

American Girl®

November/December 2002

americangirl.com \$3.95

**14 Holiday
Gifts to Make**

**Amelia Takes
a Wacky Trip**

**Free! Board
Game Inside**

PLUS!
Winners of
our story
contest!

Make Cute Candy Cottages

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Board Game**

See AG online!

Visit americangirl.com to peek behind the scenes of AG magazine! Always get a parent's permission before surfing the Web or giving out your full name, address, or any other personal info.

'Tis the Season
Sweet—and easy—
gifts to make

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Turkey Day Fun!

Oodles of ways to have
a blast with your family
this Thanksgiving

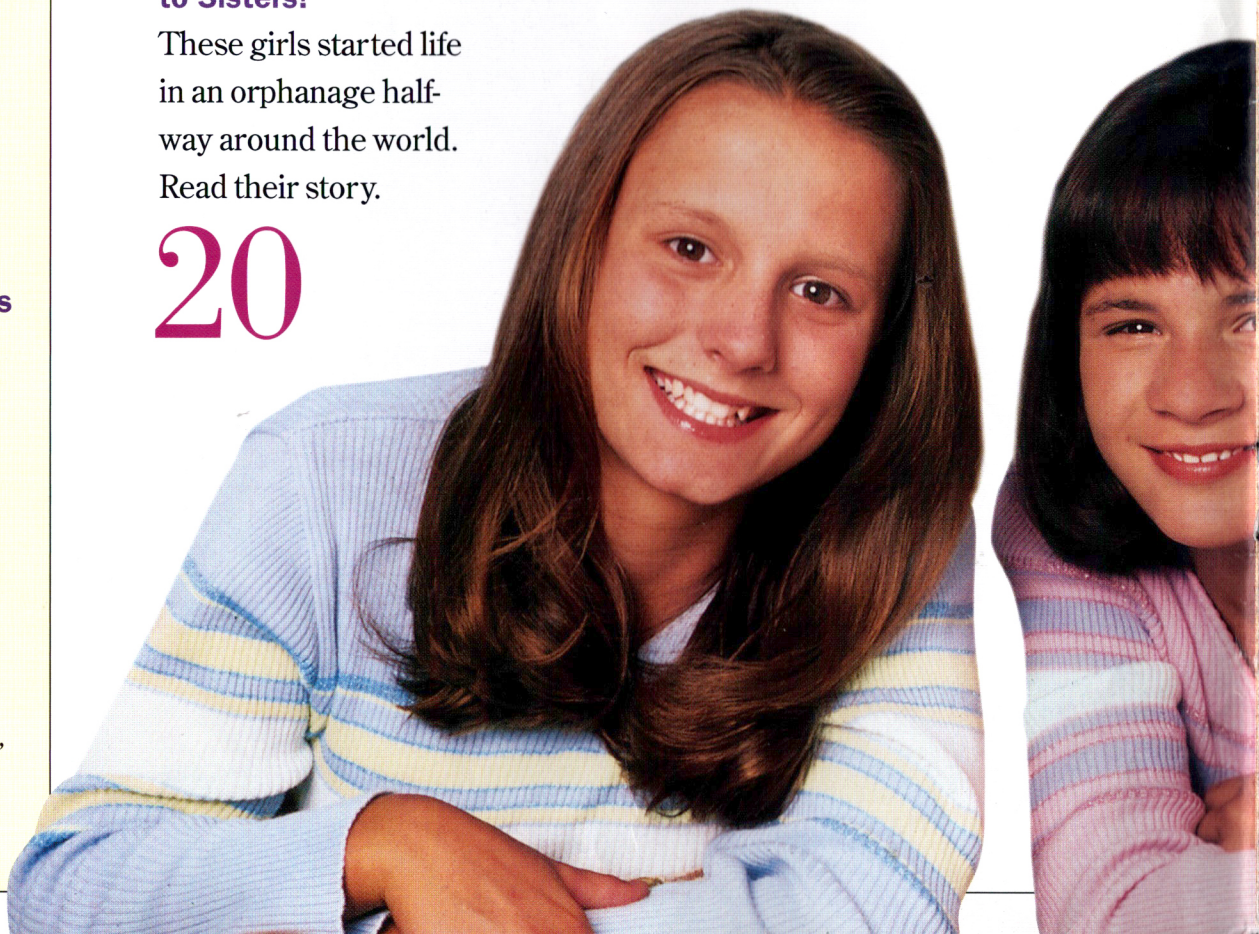
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From Friends to Sisters!

These girls started life
in an orphanage half-
way around the world.
Read their story.

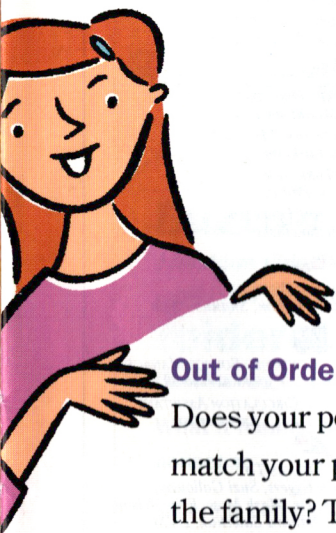
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Out of Order?

Does your personality match your place in the family? Take this quiz to find out!

12



Nikki L.



About the Cover

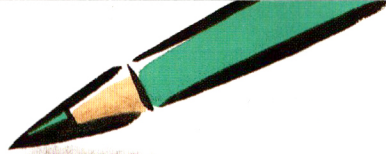
Meet Nikki L., age 12. It was on a hot day in May that Nikki got bundled up for this frosty photo! To learn more about the cover shoot, turn to "Behind the Scenes" on page 49!



Look for fun facts sprinkled throughout the magazine!



Letters from You



What's New?



I really like the new "Behind the Scenes" page at the end of the magazine. It's really neat! Are you going to keep it? And if you do, where is "Shining Star" going to go?

Jessica G.
Age 12, Nebraska

We're thrilled to hear you like the newest addition to the magazine—it's here to stay! Look for "Shining Star" now on page 4.

Sweet and Sad



I loved the horse story, "soft horse eyes," in July/August. It was such a wonderful story, and when I read it, I cried. I take care of an old, retired horse. She's a Missouri Fox Trotter, and she's a lot like Suzie. Thank you.

Maggie H.
Age 12, Missouri

Go Team!



Thanks for "Yikes!" from July/August. Last year my dance team lost in an international

competition, and one of my friends was blamed. But a parent said to us, "You win as a team, you lose as a team." The girls on my team stopped blaming my friend, and together we worked even harder to win the next time.

Dani H.
Age 13, New York

Splash Splash



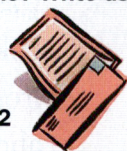
I loved your July/August issue, especially the "Splash into Summer!" pool games. My friends and I played telephone underwater. Our word started as "dolphin" and ended as "light switch"! Thank you for all the great ideas.

Elizabeth G.
Age 12, Ohio

Write to Us!

Want to drop us a line? Write us at:

AmericanGirl
8400 Fairway Place
Middleton, WI 53562



You can also send letters via e-mail to im_agmag_editor@pleasantco.com.

Either way, be sure to include your first and last name and your birth date. We can't use every letter we receive, but we read and learn from each one.

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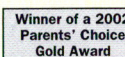
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Girls Express

Buzzword

American girls everywhere will be using this buzzword this season:

folderol

How to say it: FALL-duh-rall

What it means: foolishness; nonsense

Where it comes from: In the 1800s, folderol was a nonsense word used in songs.

One way to use it: Games, songs, candy—strict Mrs. Witherspoon allowed that kind of folderol in her class only on the day before winter break.



The buzzword is tucked somewhere into this issue of *American Girl*. Can you find it? Answer is on page 42.

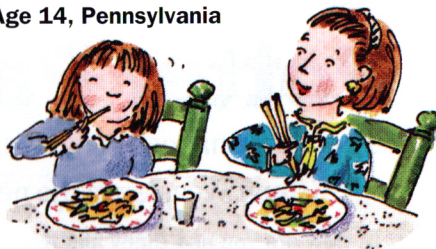
It's Tradition!

AG readers share their favorite holiday customs.



"As far back as I can remember, my mom and I have had Chinese food for Thanksgiving dinner. We wanted to be different, so we started our own tradition. I love it!"

Ariel G.
Age 14, Pennsylvania



"My dad is in the cattle business, so on Christmas Eve, we put cowboy boots out with our stockings."

Erin H.
Age 11, Oklahoma



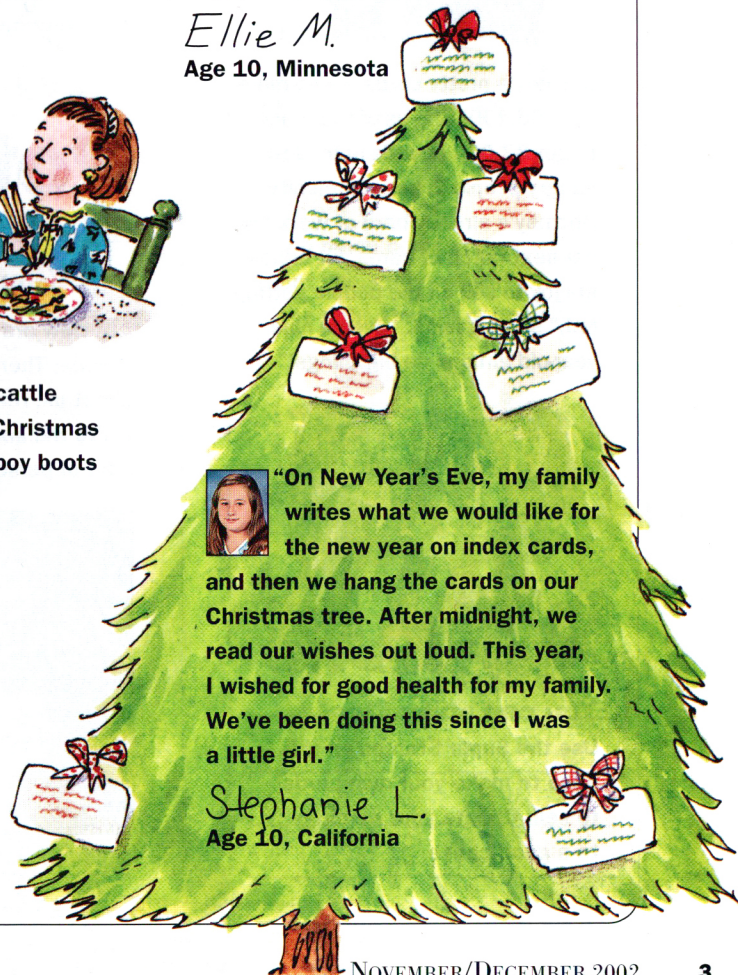
"In my family, we go caroling on Thanksgiving instead of at Christmas. Our favorite song is 'We Wish You a Happy Thanksgiving.'"

Ellie M.
Age 10, Minnesota



"On New Year's Eve, my family writes what we would like for the new year on index cards, and then we hang the cards on our Christmas tree. After midnight, we read our wishes out loud. This year, I wished for good health for my family. We've been doing this since I was a little girl."

Stephanie L.
Age 10, California



Shining Star



Brittney J. has always loved making cards for relatives and friends. After she saw a television

show about world hunger, Brittney decided to use her creativity to help. So the Oregon girl crafted hundreds of greeting cards using photos of pretty nature scenes that she collected from friends and family. Brittney sold the cards at church and local businesses. "The waterfall was the top seller," she says.



Brittney's pretty cards raised more than \$5,400! She used the money to get 33,000 pounds of food to hungry people in her community. Brittney's already hard at work on her next batch of cards. "It brings me joy to see all the people getting fed," she explains. "Even a nine-year-old girl can do big things!"



You can shine, too!

Use the Super Stamps on this page to make your own cards to sell. Donate your earnings to a good cause.

Super Stamps

Make your own stamps to add holiday cheer to cards and gift tags.



Tip: Stamp a shape on paper, cut it out, and glue it to your card.

1 Glue small **Flexi-Foam** shapes (available at craft stores) to the top of a **jar lid** in the gift pattern shown here. Let dry. You can also create stamps using existing foam shapes, like the star shown here.

2 Hold the lids to press the foam shapes onto an **ink pad**. Stamp away!

Potter Pal

AG got the chance to chat with Bonnie Wright, 11, who plays Ginny Weasley in the new Harry Potter movie!



AG: How are you and Ginny alike?

Bonnie: There aren't many things alike about us, really. I've got red hair, and we're the same age, but we don't have a lot of personality traits that are the

same. I'm not that shy, and Ginny is quite shy. And I don't love Harry!

AG: Ginny belongs to a pretty big family. Do you have any brothers or sisters?

Bonnie: I have one brother. He's older. He's 14.

AG: Who's your favorite Harry Potter character?

Bonnie: Hagrid. He's funny! He looks like a real meanie, but he's a softie inside.

AG: One last question—If you could have one item from the Harry Potter books in real life, what would you choose?

Bonnie: A broomstick, because you don't have to have a license to fly it!



Inside the Chamber of Secrets

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets hits theaters November 15.

Groovin' Gifts

We asked AG readers if these musical toys are in tune with what girls want.



Dance Dance Revolution for Sony PlayStation, \$30



"The game was hard to understand at first, but it was fun! Dancing the steps in the game helps your rhythm. You can have fun dancing even if you're not at a dance."



Olivia B.
Age 12, Kentucky



Singing Starz video karaoke machine, \$100



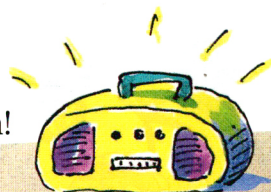
"I liked that you could see yourself singing on TV, though I wished more songs were available. It was fun to have friends come over to make videos."



Leti D.
Age 12, Maine

True Story

Kendall W. had a run-in with a real-life grinch!



Dear American Girl,

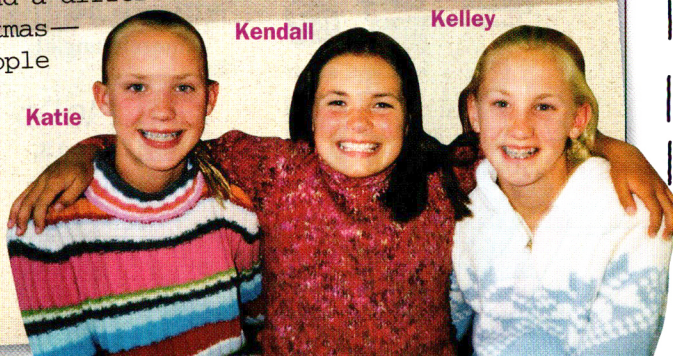
A few years ago on Christmas Eve, my family and I went to church and then out to dinner. When we came home, I was the first one inside. I looked at our Christmas tree, and it was all crooked. Then I noticed that all the presents were gone! I called to my mom, "I think we've been robbed!" And I was right!

One of the many things the robbers stole was my boom box. The next day, when my friends, twin sisters Katie and Kelley, heard what had happened, they came to my house and gave me the boom box they had just received as a Christmas gift. I knew my friends had wanted that boom box for a long time. I felt so lucky to have such good friends.

Many neighbors came by the house to give us some of their Christmas gifts, too. One family even brought us their Christmas dinner—the turkey and everything! The police never caught the robbers, but I learned that Christmas isn't about presents. We had a different kind of Christmas that year—a better Christmas—because all these people helped us when we needed help.

Sincerely,

Kendall W.
Age 12, California



AG

POLL



Your answers:

In our July/August 2002 issue, we asked you what item from the Harry Potter books you would most want in real life. Here's what you said:

Magic wand	676
Flying broomstick	367
Invisibility cloak	286
Remembrall	30



"I'd like a wand," says Deanna L., 9, of New York, "because when my brother is being mean, I could say 'Petrificus Totalus,' and he'd be as stiff as a board!"

Next question:

Too much homework can be a real hassle. How much time do you spend on homework each night?

You'd say you get...

- A. too much homework.
- B. not enough homework.
- C. the right amount of homework.



Why?

Cut out your answer and mail it to us with your first and last name, address, and birth date.

Snowflake

I've never seen a snowflake,
but I can imagine it,
tiny lace butterflies floating
in the sky,
gently resting on mares'
glossy coats,
drifting,
catching their gleam from
moonbeams and starlight,
caught in the webbing of
twitching tails.

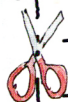
Erin S.
Age 14, Florida



Help Wanted!

Are you a super sitter? We'd love to hear your tried-and-true secrets for keeping your sitting business under control. How do you find jobs? How do you negotiate rates? Send your best tips for running a babysitting, pet-sitting, or house-sitting business to the address on page 2. Include your first and last name, address, and birth date.

Cut out your answer and mail it to us.



Santa's New Clothes

More than 2,700 of you designed duds for Santa.
Check out the latest in North Pole fashions!



Santa can catch plenty of rays in this cute swimsuit.



Devyn H.
Age 12, Oregon



Santa needs very comfy pj's for a long sleep on December 26.

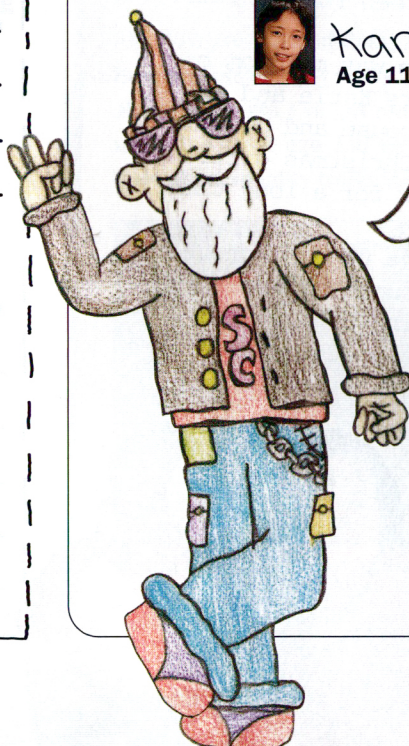


Adriana C.
Age 14, California

Hip-hop Santa
says "Yo-Ho-Ho!"



Karena U.
Age 11, Minnesota



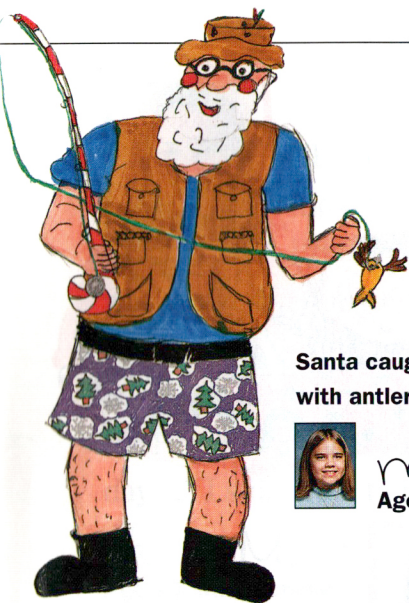
Peace
Dudes!

Santa in the
Amazon jungle!



Nora H.
Age 13,
The Netherlands





Santa caught a fish—
with antlers!

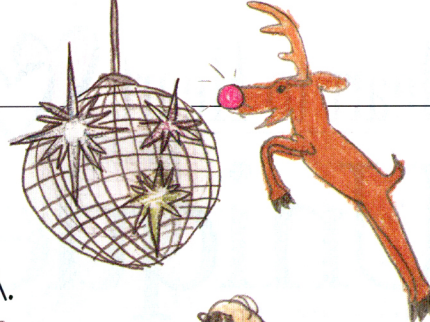


Melanie A.
Age 13, Kansas

Dance fever hits the
North Pole!



Samantha M.
Age 13, Illinois



Hippie Santa spreads
peace all year long.



Jaclyn L.
Age 12, Maryland



Soccer Santa
scores a goal!

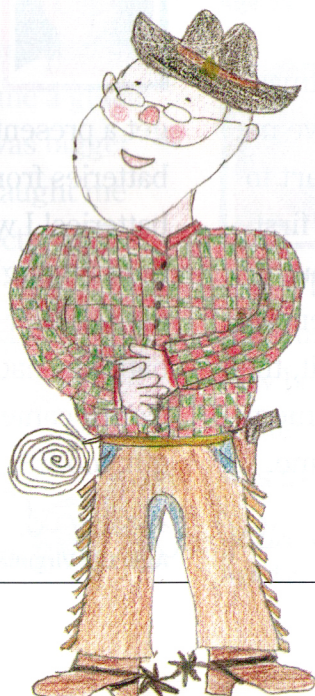


Kimberlee A.
Age 13, New Jersey

Don't get on Santa's "naughty"
list. He knows karate!



Elena B.
Age 10, New York



Cowboy Santa
rides again!

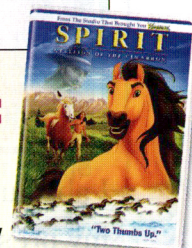


Emily P.
Age 12, Virginia

New Contest: Draw a Horse

Attention horse lovers!

Here's your chance to show off your heartfelt horse artwork. Send your best horse drawing to the address on page 2 with your first and last name, address, and birth date. The illustrators who brought horses to life for the movie *Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron* will choose the contest winners! Deadline: December 15, 2002. Winners will appear in the May/June 2003 issue.





Unique Gifts

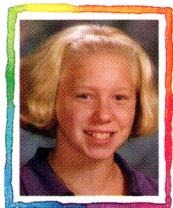
What's a weird—but wonderful—present you've gotten? What made it so special?



On my seventh birthday, a friend gave me a gift bag

full of...tomatoes! I didn't even like tomatoes at the time. I was embarrassed, but I managed to say I loved it. Then my friend said that she grew them in her garden, which made the gift special. It was a sweet and funny present.

Sarah D.
Age 10, North Carolina



I had a party for my birthday. My friends know that

I absolutely love pigs. One of my presents was a pair of pig earmuffs! We all laughed when I tried them on. That was one of my favorite gifts.

Amy B.
Age 14, Illinois



Last year, my grandma gave me a pair of

socks for my birthday. But they weren't normal socks—they had cakes, balloons, and party hats on them with pink glitter at the top, and they played "Happy Birthday." At first I was shocked, but now I think they're funny. I sure got a "kick" out of them!

Krystalynne S.
Age 12, North Carolina



One Christmas my dad gave me a silver heart to

put on my shoelaces! At first I thought it was weird, but it really is wonderful. Whenever I look at my shoe, I see it, then I think of my dad and remember how much he loves me.

Sarah B.
Age 11, Wisconsin



I opened a gift that was yellow, shiny, and had

one wheel—a unicycle! When I got it on Christmas, I was overjoyed. Balancing on it is tricky, but riding it has been great fun!

Caitlin S.
Age 13, Virginia



I'm Jewish, and on each night of Hanukkah we

get a present. One year I got batteries from my parents—just batteries! I was surprised, but then I thought maybe I could use them. It turns out that the batteries had just come apart from a camera that I got as a gift, too.

Jessy S.
Age 12, Virginia



The weirdest,
most special gift
I've ever received

was a tape from my dad. He
got a friend to sing on the tape,
so on my birthday, I woke up
to "Hey, Maura, it's your birth-
day..." I still listen to it!

Maura M.

Age 13, Massachusetts



I received a very
unusual present
once—a four-

drawer file cabinet! My parents
gave it to me for Christmas
because they know how much
I like to write and draw. It's
perfect for storing all of my
papers and projects!

Elizabeth T.

Age 10, Washington



One year my dad
gave me a guitar
that was bigger

than I was! But he taught me
how to hold it correctly and
how to play. It felt
good to spend
time with him.
Now I play
all the time.

Kaylah M.

Age 10, Massachusetts



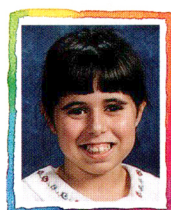
I got two huge
Madagascar hiss-
ing cockroaches.

My brother was at a hockey
tournament on my birthday, and
he brought them back for me.

I screamed when I saw them,
but I learned to
like them, and
I was sad when
they died.

Lynn R.

Age 11, Alaska



You know how
some people get
flowers or candy

for Valentine's Day? Well, I got
avocados! I think avocados are
delicious. The note from my
parents said, "Nothing says
'We love you' like avocados!"

Allison B.

Age 11, Texas



I had a very long
orchestra practice
before my birth-

day. While I was gone, my mom
redecorated my room with a
new bedspread and curtains,
painted furniture, and a rug. It
was the best present ever.

Julia D.

Age 12, Texas



My mom was
going on a trip,
and I knew I'd

miss her. At school, I opened
my backpack and out popped a
stuffed orange monkey! There
was also a card from my mom.
The monkey kept me company
while she was gone.

Amy W.

Age 11, California

Speak from Your Heart

**Next subject: Mother's Day and
Father's Day memories. How have
you celebrated these special days?
Going to a place you both enjoy?
Working on a project together?
Giving a gift you made yourself?**

**Send answers, first and last
name, birth date, and photo to:**

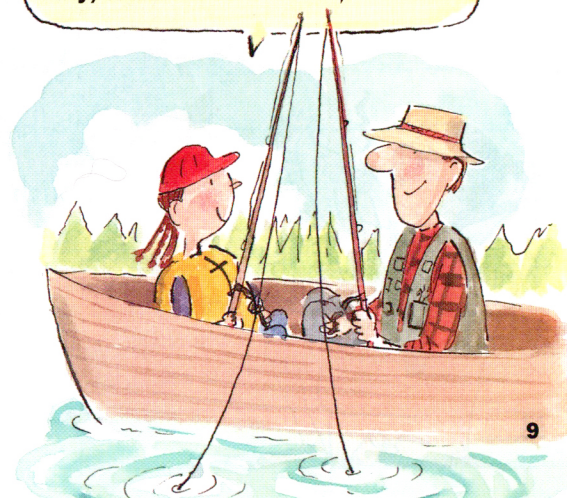
AmericanGirl

8400 Fairway Place

Middleton, WI 53562.

Deadline: December 7, 2002.

**Some answers will appear in the
May/June 2003 issue. ★**



Amelia's Notebook

MY LETTER (ADJECTIVE) TO NADIA

by Marissa Moss

(and On-the-Road-Again Amelia)



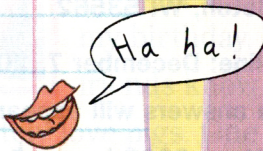
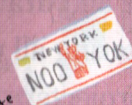
While Amelia's family was driving to her aunt's for Thanksgiving, Amelia wrote a letter to her friend Nadia. But her sister Cleo got ahold of it and erased some of the words! You and a friend can help finish Amelia's letter.

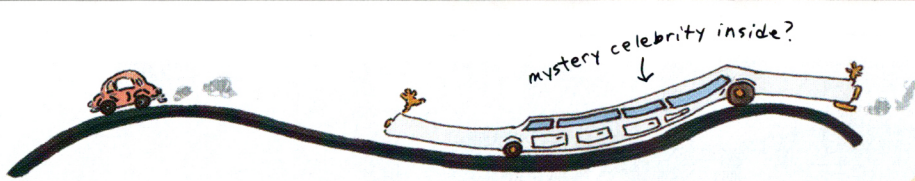
Ask your friend for the kind of word listed under each blank below. Write her words in the blanks or on a separate piece of paper. Then read back the silly letter using your friend's words. How did Amelia's trip turn out?



Dear Nadia,

I'm in the middle of a reeeeeeeallly long car trip to India (PLACE) with Mom and OLLIE (PROPER NAME). What a smart (ADJECTIVE) place to spend Thanksgiving! Holidays are fun, but car trips are hairy (ADJECTIVE). Mom drives like a mouse (ANIMAL), and I hate being stuck in the backseat with Cleo. She's going to swim (VERB) her nose (BODY PART) with hot (ADJECTIVE) purple nail polish. It stinks! But the absolutely WORST part is when Cleo sleep (VERB)s with her Walkman. She sings so quickly (ADVERB) that it peels the nail polish off her chin (BODY PART)s!





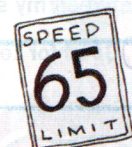
watch out
for cars on
springs -
BOING!



no reading backward-
ixnay!



absolutely
no, don't
even think
about doing it!



C'mon, Mom,
put the pedal
to the metal!

matchbook for my collection



For lunch today we stopped at a green diner.
(ADJECTIVE)
The carrot pie tasted like a tired bottle. At least
(VEGETABLE) (ADJECTIVE) (NOUN)
there was a pretty jukebox. Cleo and I like to eat
(ADJECTIVE) (VERB)
together to old songs like "Rock Around the socks."
(SOMETHING UNDER YOUR BED)
I had a grilled ice cream sandwich
(DESSERT)
and sad Jell-O.
(ADJECTIVE)



After we ate, we drove by a
bold landmark where
(ADJECTIVE)
there's a huge flower made out of granola. And guess
(NOUN) (FAVORITE CEREAL)
what? We saw a movie star there! I took a photo of Will
(MOVIE STAR'S FIRST NAME)
blender. You know, the one who was in the movie
(KITCHEN APPLIANCE)
"Return of the eggs."
(SOMETHING IN YOUR REFRIGERATOR)

It should only take 132 more hours to get to my aunt's
(BIG NUMBER)
spoon. I can't wait to get out of this truck! Instead of
(NOUN) (NOUN)
smelling finger polish, I'll smell baking gummy bear and mashed
(BODY PART) (CANDY)
cars. My aunt's friend will be there, too, with her dog.
(NOUN)
It's fun to talk with him, even though he's wild. One wag of
(VERB)
his tree and I move! I hope someday Mom will get me a
(NOUN) (VERB)
pet leopard. Now, that would be something to be thankful for! ★
(EXOTIC ANIMAL)

Yours till the cap Swings,
(NOUN) (VERB)
Amelia

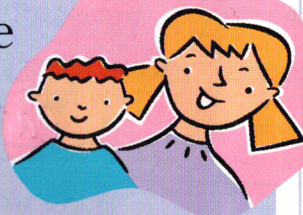
This letter was inspired by *Amelia Hits the Road*
and *Amelia Works It Out!* Check out other fun
Amelia games at americangirl.com.

Quiz

Out of Order?

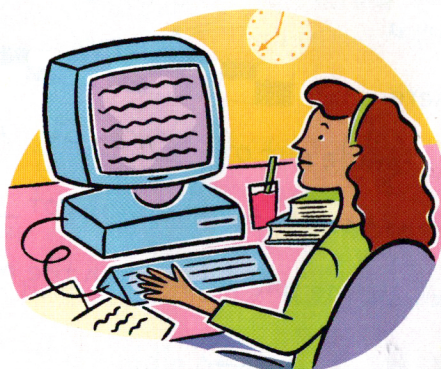


Do you have the personality of a kid born first, last, or somewhere in-between? Or maybe you're like an only child. Take this quiz and find out! Circle one answer for each question.



Which of these gift coupons would you give your parents for the holidays?

- a. Good for one day of help around the house
- b. Good for one evening of babysitting
- c. Good for settling one argument between my siblings
- ☒ d. Good for ten hugs and kisses

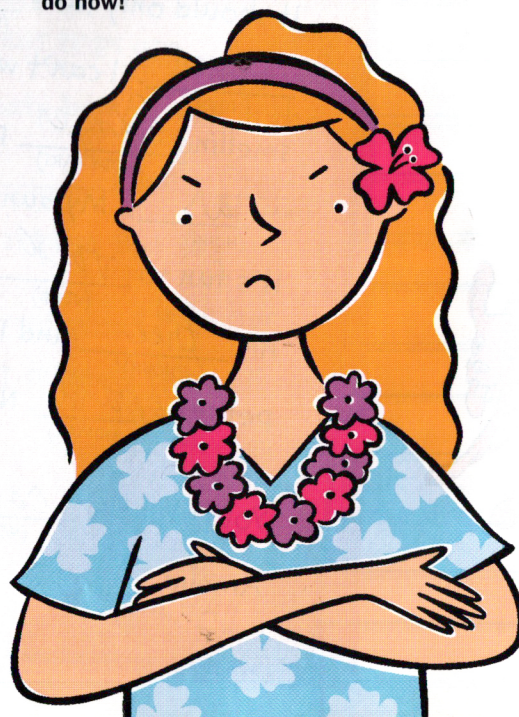


Today is your birthday. You've planned the party activities, but your guests start to play another game instead. What do you say?

- a. "It's my birthday, so I get to pick what we do."
- b. "But this is a tropical-themed party, and that's not a tropical game."
- c. "No problem. I love that game!"
- ☒ d. "If you think that game is fun, just wait until you see what we're going to do now!"

Whew! You've just printed out a five-page report for school. What do you do next?

- a. Hope the teacher likes it so much, she asks you to read it in front of the whole class.
- b. Check for mistakes, find one, and reprint the whole report.
- c. Give yourself a pat on the back for getting it done on time, and go call one of your friends.
- ☒ d. Make a beautiful cover for it.



Your friends want to sled down the best hill in town—in mean old Mr. Hanson’s backyard. It doesn’t look as if he’s home. What do you say?

- a. “No way. Mr. Hanson won’t like it if we play in his yard.”
- b. “I don’t think I should. My mom will be really mad if I get in trouble.”
- ☒ c. “Let’s go to the park instead. I know a great secret hill there.”
- d. “Last one to the bottom of the hill is a rotten egg!”



a - 1
b - 0
c - 2
d - 4



You want a dog. How do you ask your parents for one?

- ☒ a. Say, “I’m lonely. I wish I had a dog to play with.”
- b. Research what breed of dog would be best for you and why, then present your findings to your parents.
- c. Say, “If you let me get a dog, I’ll get up early to walk it, and I’ll put half of my allowance every week toward paying for its food.”
- d. Ask for a dog every chance you get until they say yes.

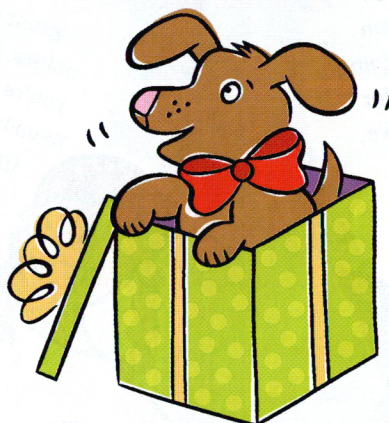
Hooray for the weekend! What is your favorite way to spend time on Saturday?

- a. Shopping with Mom, then curling up with a good book
- b. Tackling a challenging craft project
- ☒ c. Getting a bunch of friends together for a movie marathon at your house
- d. Hanging around doing whatever the rest of the family is doing



Fast-forward to the year 2032. Where are you?

- a. Being interviewed about what it was like to climb Mount Everest by yourself
- b. Working on making the world a better place from your desk in the White House
- c. Being a family counselor, helping people solve their problems and get along better
- ☒ d. Starting your own business writing and illustrating funny children’s books




Turn the page to see if your answers match your real place in your family.

Answers Here's what the experts say about your answers. See if you agree. Then ask other members of your family to take the quiz, too!

Mostly A's

If you answered mostly a's, you're like an outstanding only child. Confident and mature beyond your years, you like to please adults and be the center of attention. You're good at spending time alone, and you believe you can do just about anything without much help. Seeing another person's side when you disagree might be hard for you, though, so remember to compromise sometimes.

 **Talented actress Natalie Portman is an only child.**



Mostly B's

If you answered mostly b's, you act like a fabulous firstborn. You're motivated, responsible, organized, and can be a bit of a perfectionist. Pleasing your parents is important to you, and your natural leadership skills shine. When things don't work out the way you want, you tend to blame yourself, so don't forget that no one's perfect.

Firstborn author J. K. Rowling has a younger sister.




Mostly C's

If you answered mostly c's, you're like a marvelous middle child. Getting along with people is easy for you, and you're good at settling arguments. When things don't go exactly your way, you're easygoing and flexible, but you know how to negotiate for what you want. You can be a bit too competitive, though, so just focus on doing your best, no matter what everyone else is doing.

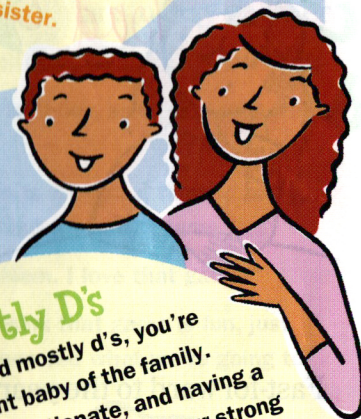
Super skater Sarah Hughes is the middle child of six siblings.

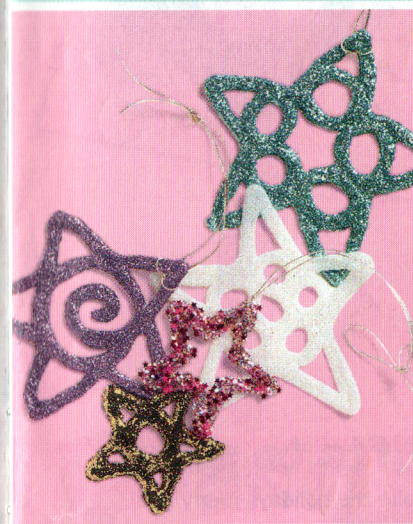
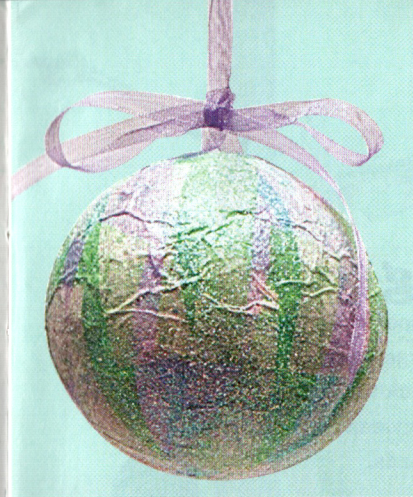


Mostly D's

If you answered mostly d's, you're like the brilliant baby of the family. Creativity, being affectionate, and having a great sense of humor are a few of your strong points. Taking risks is no problem for you because you're not afraid to fail. You're persistent and can usually motivate people to do what you want to do. Questioning authority can get you in trouble sometimes, so think twice before you say something you'll regret. 

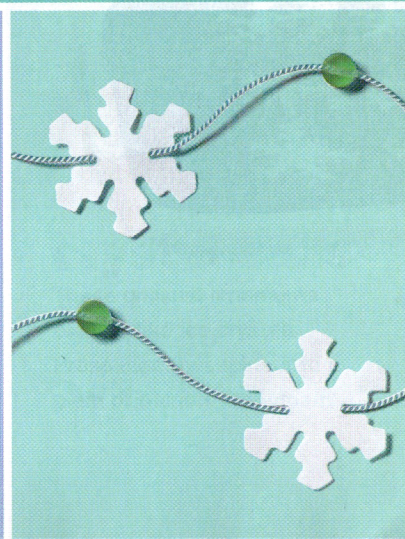
Tennis star Serena Williams is the youngest of five sisters.





A
gift
made
by hand
will brighten
up the holidays
and show you really
care!

**'tis the
season**





snowflake string

Tie a pretty garland to a present or use it to decorate. Stretch out a colorful **cord** on the floor. String **beads** along the cord. (Use a cord that just fits through the holes in the beads.) If beads slip, add a dot of **glue**. Make

paper snowflakes with a **large paper punch**, and glue back-to-back between beads.



snowy sweets

Sift snowy shapes onto store-bought cookies, cakes, or even candy! Punch a design from a piece of **construction paper** using a favorite large holiday **paper punch**. Center paper with design punched out of it over a treat. Using a **flour sifter**, lightly sift **powdered sugar** over paper, then very carefully lift paper straight up.



gifts to glow

Make the holidays merry and bright with sparkling votive holders. Cover top edge of a **small glass flowerpot** with **microbead tape**. Working over a **rimmed cookie sheet**, spoon **microbeads** over tape. Roll edge in beads to fill in gaps.



santa's elf

Keep a holiday helper hanging around! Roll **paper clay** into a small ball, then shape it into a teardrop. Roll a rope shape, flatten it against hat for fur trim, then poke "fur" with a **toothpick** to add texture. Insert a **jewelry finding loop**, string on a **cord**, and hang to dry


for 3 days. Add 2 coats of **paint**. Let dry between coats. Draw face with **waterproof markers**. Paint **glitter glue** on fur. Let dry.





tissue balls

1 Blow up **water balloons** to baseball size. Cut **tissue paper** into 1-by-4-inch strips.

2  For 2 balls, mix 1 tablespoon **wheat starch** (found at art stores) and 5 tablespoons **water** in a **microwavable bowl**. With an adult's help, **microwave** on high for 20 seconds, stir, heat 10 seconds, stir, then heat 10 seconds more.

3 Use a **paintbrush** to

cover balloon in paste. Lay strips on balloon, and paint paste over them. Overlap 2 or 3 layers of strips. Sprinkle **clear fine glitter** over balls.

4 **Clothespin** balloon knot to a **string** and hang. Slip **newspapers** underneath. Let dry for 1 to 2 days. Unpin balloon, pop it, then gently remove it through knot area. Dip tissue paper square in paste and cover hole. Glue on **ribbon**. Let dry.



shimmering shells *

Decorate a tree with treasures from the sea. **Shells** and **starfish** glimmer when painted with **glitter glue**. Apply glue to both

sides with a **paintbrush**. Let dry. Cross ends of a short loop of **ribbon**, and glue them flat to the top of the back side. Let dry.



crystal balls

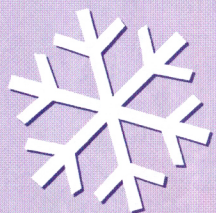
These unusual ornaments twinkle like ice crystals. Press **clear pushpins** into a plain or painted **Styrofoam**

ball. To hang, add **craft glue** to a pushpin point, and press a **ribbon** into ball. Let dry.

secret santa stockings

Your pals will love these personalized socks!

Homespun style. Spread fabric glue over cuff and toe of a knitted sock. Press on beads. Let dry.



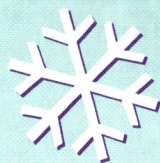
Puffy and playful. Crown a chenille sock with a jester cap. Cut the cap from felt using scissors. Use fabric glue to attach felt to the sock. Glue on felt buttons and decorate toe.



Sweet sock! Cut felt with scissors. Use fabric glue to accent a candy cane-colored sock with felt trim, felt shapes, and beads.



Winter blues! Cut felt with regular scissors and craft scissors. Stick to cuff and toe of seasonal sock with fabric glue. Add a felt loop to top edge. Stitch on a silver jingle bell.

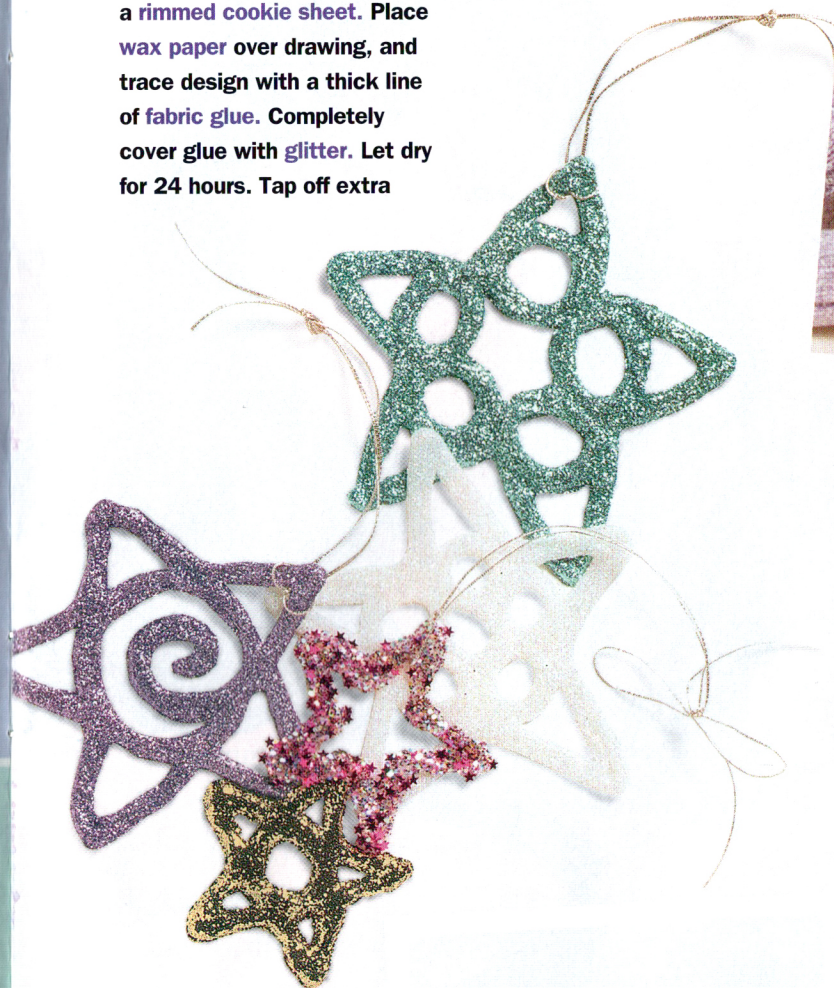


hint Let glue dry before stuffing sock with gifts or treats.

stars of wonder

Make glittery stars to hang on a tree. Draw a star on a piece of paper, then lay it on a rimmed cookie sheet. Place wax paper over drawing, and trace design with a thick line of fabric glue. Completely cover glue with glitter. Let dry for 24 hours. Tap off extra

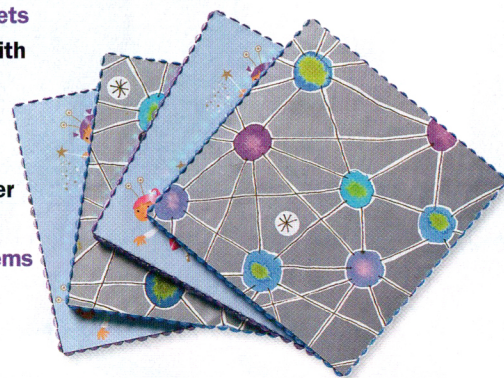
glitter over cookie sheet, then gently pull star from wax paper. Tie on ribbon or cord.



christmas coasters

Serve seasonal sippers on coasters made from wrapping paper. To make 4 coasters, cut 1/8-inch-thick cork sheets into four 4-inch squares with scissors. Cover wrapping paper with clear contact paper, and cut out eight 4-inch squares. Stick paper to cork with heavy-duty double-stick tape. Glue gems around edges with jewel

glue. Let dry overnight. Wipe coasters clean with a damp cloth. Do not put in water.



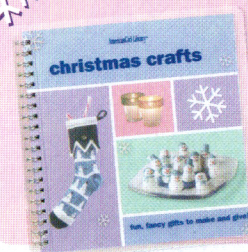
holiday hair set

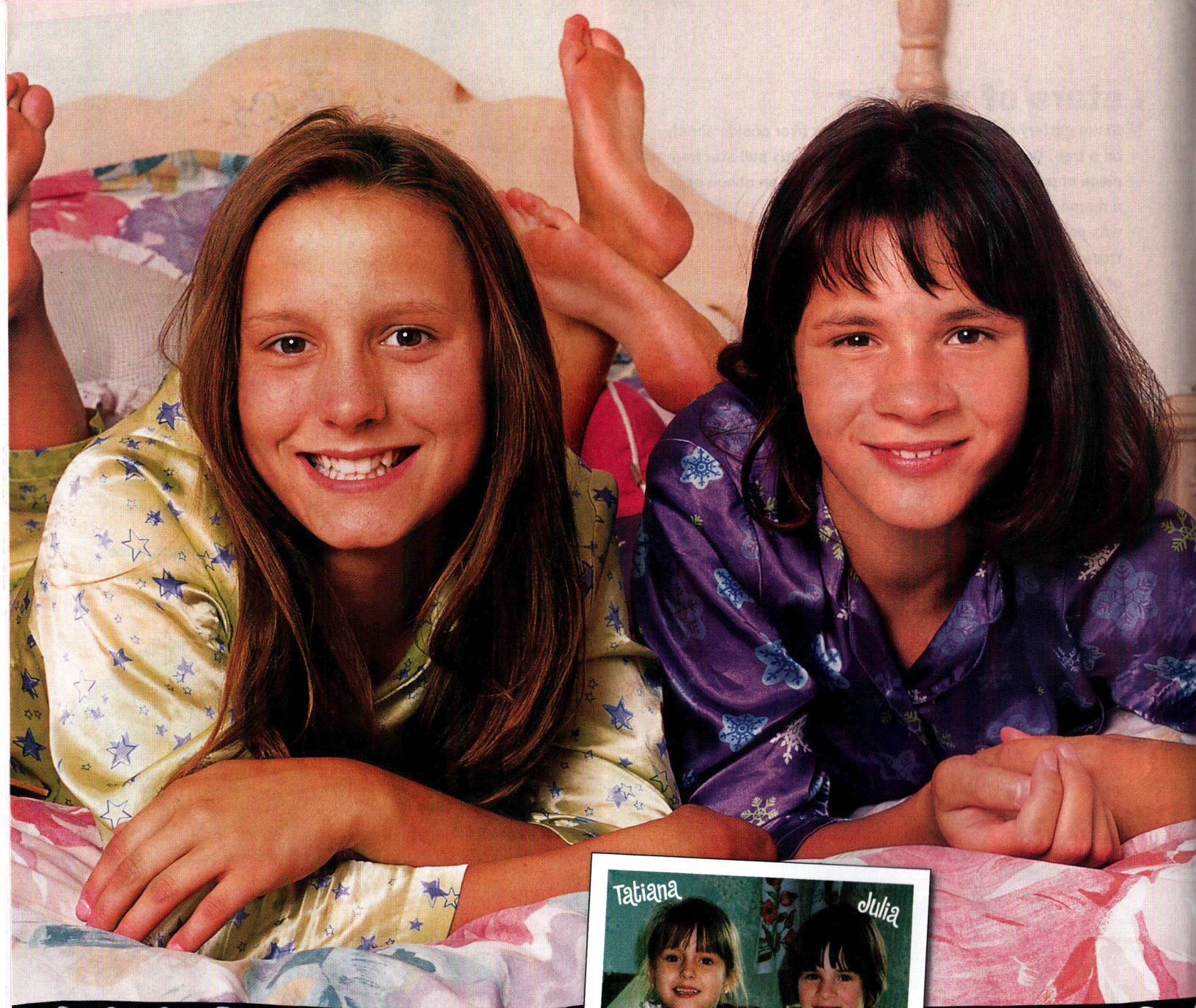
Reflect the holidays in a mirror and brush set. Outline a holiday design on adhesive microbead paper. Cut out the design. Pull off the paper's backing sheet, stick the

paper on the back of a brush and mirror, then pull off the top sheet. Place item over a rimmed cookie sheet, and spoon on microbeads. Tap off excess beads. For a stronger hold, use a small paintbrush to cover beads with craft glue. Let dry. ★



All ideas are from the new book *Christmas Crafts* from American Girl Library, now in stores.

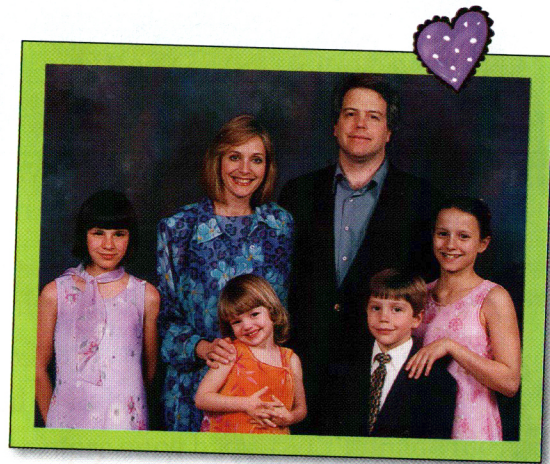




From Friends to Sisters!



♥ Best friends become sisters
in this true tale of a family kept
apart by distance and time—
then brought together by love. ♥



Julia, Linda, Natalia, Brad, Grant, and Tatiana

Ten years ago, Tatiana and Julia B. didn't have families. The girls lived in an orphanage in the country of Belarus, near Russia. The orphanage was the only home both Julia and Tatiana had ever known. The two friends slept in the same room, shared the same food, and loved to play together. "We would run around, yelling and just being crazy sometimes," Tatiana recalls. ♥ The girls had no way of knowing that their lives were about to change forever.

Half a world away, a Colorado woman named Linda B. dreamed of adopting a child. Adoption is a complicated process—it takes time and a lot of paperwork. But eventually, with the help of the government of Belarus and an adoption agency, Linda decided that she and Tatiana would make a good match. In June of 1993, Linda flew to Belarus to adopt her new daughter.



Linda and Tatiana, 1993

Meeting Mom

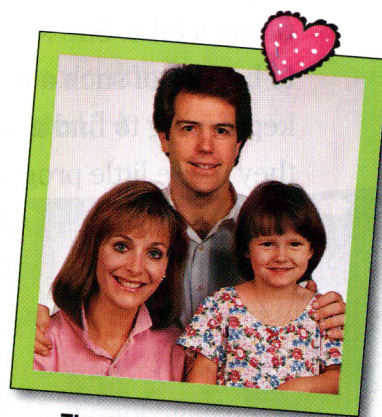
Even though Tatiana was only four years old, she still remembers her first night with Linda. "Mom came to the orphanage really, really late. Everyone was fast

asleep in their cribs," Tatiana recalls. "She came in and asked if she could see me. That was the first time she got to hold me. And I saw her for the very first time. I was really happy."

Soon, all the kids sleeping nearby woke up and gathered close to Linda to find out what was going on. Linda remembers putting her arm around a small, dark-haired girl. That girl was Julia, Tatiana's best friend. Linda felt a special connection with Julia right away. By the time Linda left the orphanage, she wished she could adopt Julia, too.

Two days after Linda and Tatiana returned to the United States as mother and daughter, Linda married her fiancé, Brad. Tatiana now had a new mom and a new dad. Even so, all three knew that their family was not complete without Julia.

Linda and Brad wanted to adopt Julia as soon as possible. But they hit a roadblock. The government of Belarus stopped all international adoptions—no one from outside Belarus would be allowed to adopt children living at orphanages in Belarus. When would the family see Julia again? They didn't know.



The family's first photo



These sisters love spending time together. "We ride bikes. We shop. We go swimming. And we talk a lot!" says Tatiana.

The Waiting Game

Over the next months—and years—Tatiana became an American girl. She got to know her parents' relatives and friends. She learned to speak English. She practiced swimming and riding a bike. She started school. She was thrilled to be part of such a wonderful family! Her parents kept trying to find a way to adopt Julia, though they made little progress. But Tatiana always had faith that her friend would become family. "I was never worried it wouldn't work out," she says. "I knew that Julia was going to be my sister."

Back in Belarus, Julia had moved to an orphanage for older children. She made many friends there, but she longed for a family. Linda visited Julia six times over three years, assuring Julia that she wanted to adopt her. On each visit, Linda shared photos and stories from Tatiana, Brad, and her baby son Grant, hoping Julia would feel like a part of the family. Still, Linda and Brad were not permitted to adopt Julia. They kept trying.

Finally in 1995, two years after Tatiana first came home with Linda, Belarus started allowing new adoptions. Linda and Brad filed the paperwork for Julia's adoption, and the family prepared for her arrival. "I had to get our room really nice and special for her," says Tatiana, "and we got her toys and clothes like my mom and dad got for me." Everyone in the family focused on doing whatever it took to bring Julia home. "I was a little jealous," Tatiana admits, but "I was really happy, because I wanted a sister!"

Even though Linda had told Julia that she wanted to adopt her, Julia was never certain her wish would come true. "Then Mom came one day, and we had a big party, and I wasn't sure why," Julia recalls. "She explained to me that we were going on an airplane to America—that's when I knew she was adopting me." By this time, late in 1996, Julia was seven and a half years old. "I was excited to be going to a new family. And I liked meeting new friends," she says, "but I was just kind of wondering what it would be like."



Julia and Linda, 1996

Sisters at Last

Julia and Tatiana will always cherish the moment they first met as sisters. "We came to a big airport, and my dad was standing there with my sister and my brother," Julia recalls. "I was so happy to see my new family!" When Tatiana thinks of that day, she remembers exactly how her new sister looked. "It was fun to see Julia walk off the airplane with her short, short hair and her new clothes." Both girls agree it felt great to be reunited.

Going to school was the toughest part of Julia's new life in America. She had never attended school in Belarus, and American school frightened her, especially since she didn't speak much English. "I didn't want to go! It was just too scary," Julia remembers. But with the help of some great



Tatiana and Julia hang out with their younger sister Natalia.

teachers, Julia learned English and adjusted to school quickly. Julia relied on her sister at school, too. "Tatiana helped me with my homework and with English words," says Julia.

In spite of her struggles, Julia loved her new life. "Being with my new family—my mom and dad and

my little brother and Tatiana—was wonderful," she says. Both sisters enjoyed each other's friendship. "I loved all the girl things we could do that I could never do with my brother," Tatiana explains. Julia adds, "It's really great to have my best friend as my sister!"

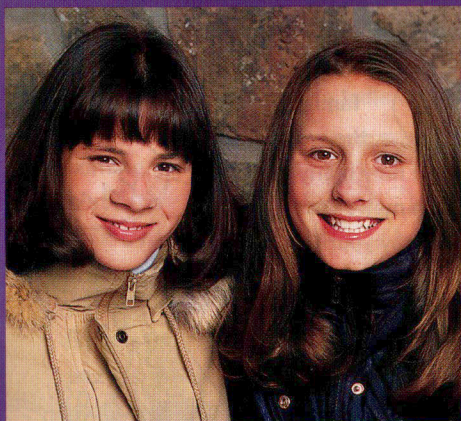
Last summer, Julia, Tatiana, Grant, their younger sister Natalia, and their mom and dad all traveled to Belarus to visit the orphanage where the sisters once had lived. "It made me happy to see the people I knew," says Julia, now 13. But the visit also taught Julia that "life's not always easy." Julia realized how lucky she is to have a wonderful home, a good school, and, most of all, a loving family.



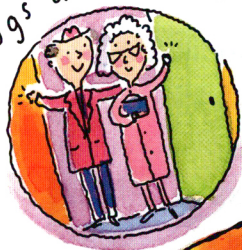
At the end of the trip, Tatiana found it very difficult to leave the new young friends she made at the orphanage. "It was hard to see all those little kids' faces, thinking that they didn't have families and knowing that I did," explains Tatiana, who's also 13. "It makes me feel really lucky to have a mom and dad who care about me so much, who wanted to bring me into their lives and love me."

Julia sums up how she feels more simply: "It's really wonderful to be adopted." ★

♥ "It's really great to have my best friend as my sister!" ♥



hugs all around!



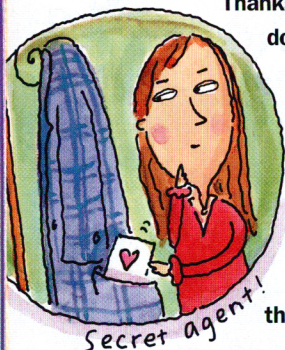
Turkey Day

You'll be thankful you tried these 25 ways to have fun with your family this holiday season!

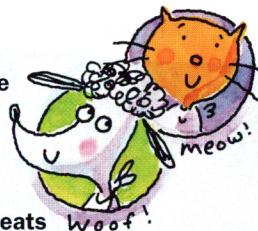


1 You've probably heard of Secret Santas. This year, start a brand-new Thanksgiving tradition—Secret Turkeys! Write each family member's name on a slip of paper. Have each person draw one name. Then, during the week before

Thanksgiving, each person does nice things—in secret—for the person whose name she or he drew. Try giving small gifts or making the person's bed. On Thanksgiving, family members guess who their Secret Turkeys are.



2 Don't leave your pets out of the holiday folderol! Make these special treats for your dog or cat.



RECIPE

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Mix together $\frac{3}{4}$ cup wheat germ and 3 2.5-ounce jars turkey baby food. Roll dough into dime-sized balls. Place balls on a greased cookie sheet, and flatten slightly with a fork. Ask an adult to bake treats for 10 minutes. Store treats in the refrigerator.

3 Get together with your siblings and parents and pick a silly, secret Thanksgiving word—choose “yams” or “baster” or anything else related to the big day.

On Thanksgiving, try to get family and friends to say the word. Keep track of how many times you can make your guests say your secret word.

Cornucopia

gourd

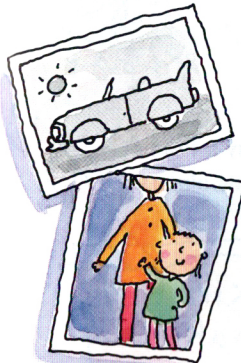
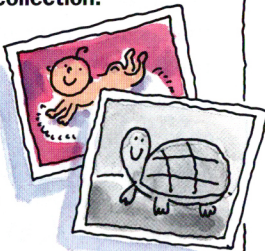
I love YAMS!



4

Have a photo-album scavenger hunt! Try to find the following things in your family's photo collection:

- someone sleeping
- someone blinking
- someone cooking
- a crying baby
- a naked baby
- a black-and-white photo of a pet

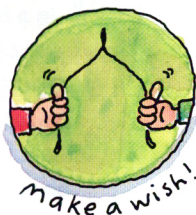


- an old car
- a record player
- a kissing couple
- a photo with someone's head cut off
- a photo of a cake
- a photo of wrapped presents

5

Create a new tradition for what to do with the wishbone from your family's Thanksgiving turkey.

Maybe whoever finds the wishbone can skip dish duty that night. Or perhaps the person who pulls the shorter end of the bone has to make a dessert for next year's Thanksgiving feast.



6

A week before Thanksgiving, snatch the gravy ladle from the kitchen. Hide it under an unsuspecting family member's pillow, or in her robe pocket, or in his sock drawer—anyplace where the person is sure to find it. Then she or he hides it for someone else to find. Whoever ends up with the ladle on Thanksgiving morning has to set the table for the big meal. Make sure to explain the game to your whole family.



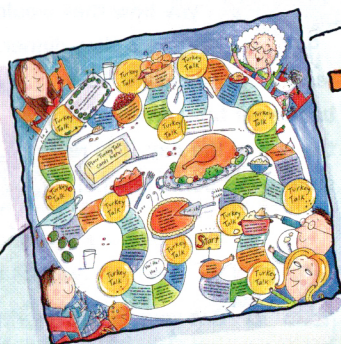
7

Choose a tree near your home and take a family picture in front of it. Try to take a picture of the same people in front of the same tree every year on Thanksgiving Day.



8

Label poster board with the words "What I'm Thankful For." On Thanksgiving, set out the poster board, pens, and markers. Ask the guests at your get-together to fill in the poster. When dinnertime arrives, read the messages and give thanks together!



How to Play:

You'll need the Turkey Talk game board and cards, one game piece for each player (use nuts, buttons, or anything small), and a die. Gently tear out the Turkey Talk cards and place them facedown on the game board.

Place all the game pieces on start. The youngest player in the game goes first. Play goes counterclockwise (also the

9

What's your family's spice IQ? To find out, ask Dad or Mom to get out the spice rack. Open the jars, and rubber band a tissue over the top of each jar so that it hides the jar's label. Mark each tissue with a letter. Keep a list of which spice goes with each letter. Then ask family members to take a sniff from each jar and write down what spice they think it contains. The person who guesses the most spices wins!



10

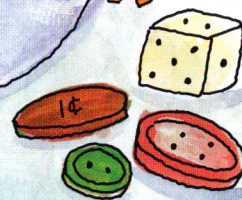
Ask everyone attending your Thanksgiving dinner to bring a few cans of food to donate to charity. Then, sometime after Thanksgiving, get your parents and siblings together and take the food you've collected to a local soup kitchen or food pantry.

11

Play the AG board game

Turkey Talk

with your family.



polite direction to pass food at the table!). Roll the die and move your game piece forward. Follow the instructions on the space you land on. If you land on a Turkey Talk space, draw a Turkey Talk card, read the question, and answer it. Put the card back on the bottom of the pile. The first player to reach the pumpkin pie wins!



12

Hold a family game marathon. Each member of the family chooses her favorite easy board or card game, like Sorry, Crazy Eights, or Candyland. The whole family plays each game one time. When you're done playing, check out millionminute.com. The people who run the site are trying

to get families to play one million total minutes of games this fall. If you log on, you can add your family's time to the total.



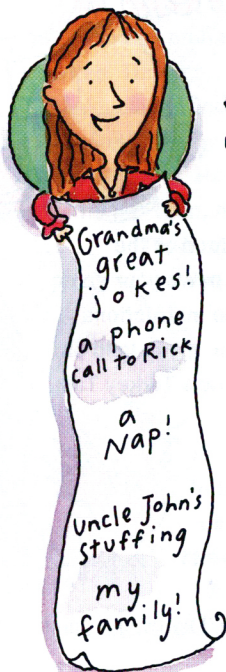
13

Serenade your family with AG's silly Thanksgiving carols (words are on the back of the game board).



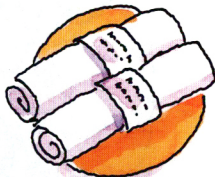
14

At dinner one night the week before Thanksgiving, ask each member of your family to list the things she or he thinks make up a perfect Thanksgiving Day. Try to include at least one item from each person's list in your real Thanksgiving celebration.



15

Write conversation-starter questions on strips of paper. (See Turkey Talk game cards for ideas.) Glue the ends of each strip together to form a loop, and use the loops as napkin rings at Thanksgiving dinner. Or just tuck the conversation-starter slips into the napkins themselves.



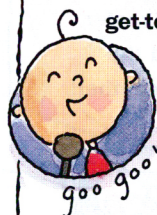
What's the funniest thing that ever happened to you on Thanksgiving?

If you could spend Thanksgiving anywhere, where would you go?

16

Bring a tape recorder or video recorder to your family's Thanksgiving get-together. Ask the

youngest guests at your gathering (kids six and under are best) to tell you how they would make a turkey dinner, and record their answers. Play back your tape or video at the end of the day. You're sure to get some laughs!



17

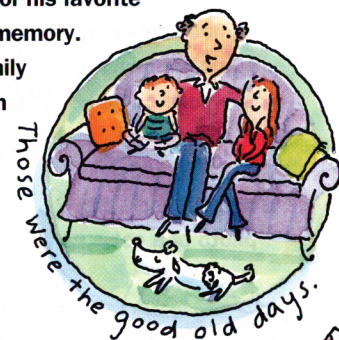
Get your family together for a nice walk after Thanksgiving dinner. It's a great way to get some fresh air, spend time together, and work up an appetite for dessert!



18

On Thanksgiving Day, ask each person at your family's gathering to tell you her or his favorite Thanksgiving memory.

You'll hear family stories you can cherish for a lifetime.



19

If your family's tired of pumpkin pie, mix up this simple shake instead.

Pumpkin Spice Shake

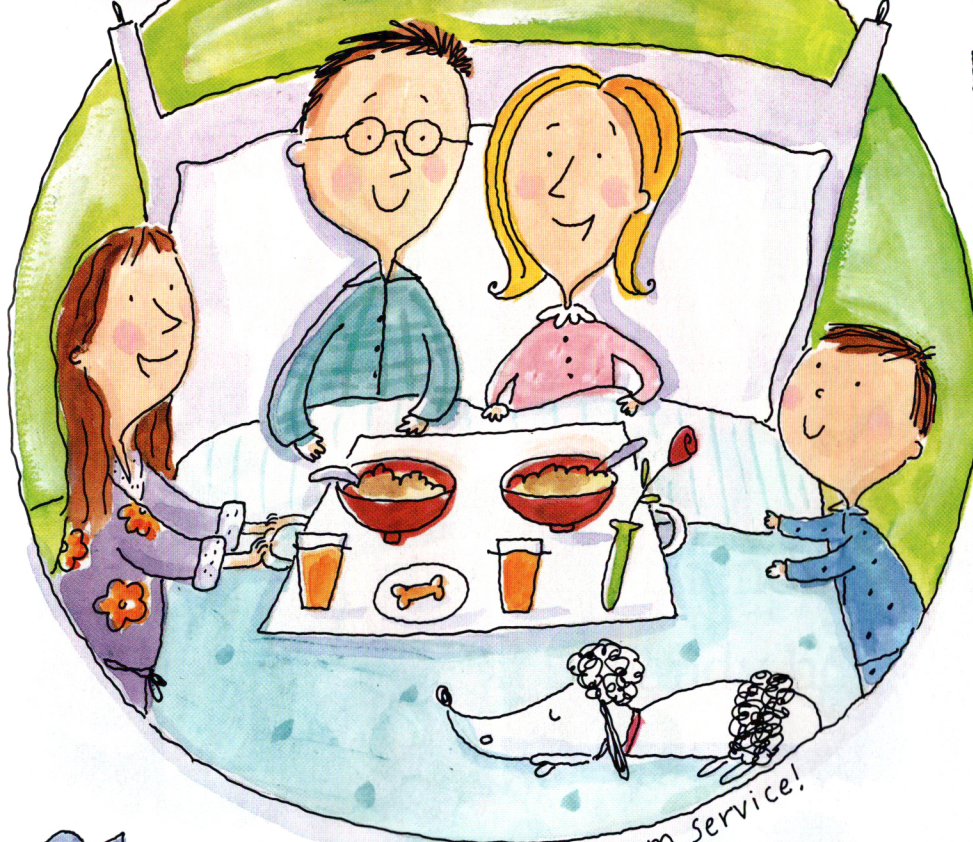


In a blender, combine $\frac{1}{4}$ cup canned pumpkin pie filling, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup milk, and 3 scoops vanilla ice cream. Ask an adult to blend well. Sprinkle with cinnamon and nutmeg. Makes 2 shakes.

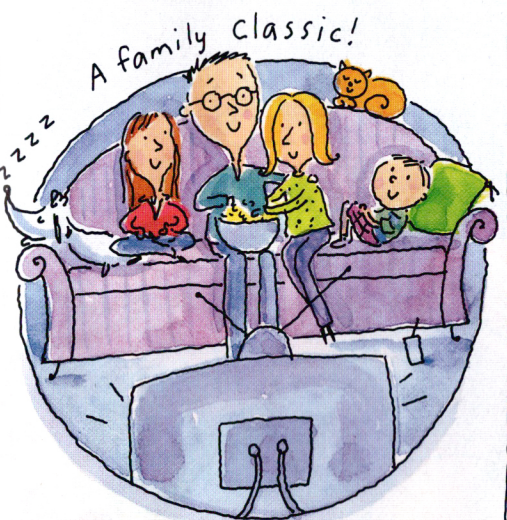
20

Hold a "Turkey Trot" family dance party. There's no better way to work off that big Thanksgiving meal—and learn a goofy new dance step from your dad at the same time.



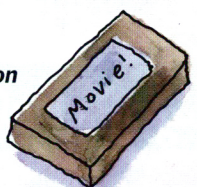


21 The morning after Thanksgiving, serve breakfast in bed to the chefs who cooked the big meal. They deserve it!

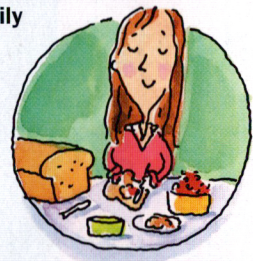


22 Pop some popcorn, get your family together, and enjoy one of these classic family movies:

- *Singin' in the Rain*
- *The Absent-Minded Professor*
- *The Love Bug*
- *Oliver!*
- *National Velvet*
- *The Black Stallion*

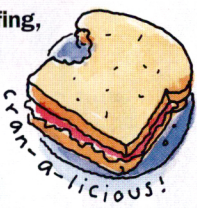


23 Save Mom and Dad from cooking the day after Thanksgiving. Serve your family these super-duper leftover sandwiches:



Cranberry Delight

Spread cream cheese on a slice of hearty bread. Spread cranberry sauce over the cream cheese, then top with turkey, stuffing, lettuce, and another slice of bread. Yum!



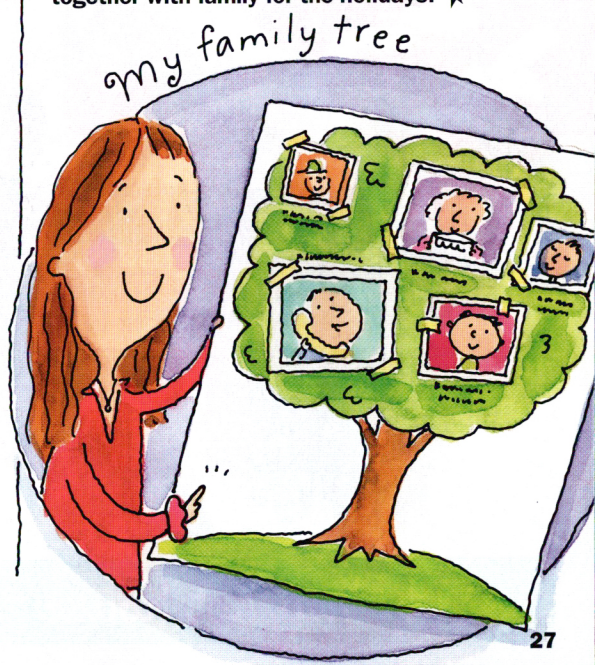
Turkey Roll-Up

Fill a large tortilla with turkey and any other warmed Thanksgiving leftovers that appeal to you—green beans, stuffing, mashed potatoes... almost anything will taste great on this sandwich. Roll up the tortilla and enjoy!

24 Bring out the best in your family with these sweet brag sheets. Write each family member's name at the top of a sheet of nice stationery. Circulate the sheets among the members of your family. Tell everyone to write one great thing about the person whose name is at the top of the sheet and pass the page on to another family member. When the sheets are complete, give each family member her or his brag sheet at a special family dinner.



25 Create a funny family tree. Draw the outline of a tree on poster board and fill the tree with labels that describe members of your family, such as "funkiest dresser," "best phone talker," "best dessert chef," "longest shower taker," "best storyteller," etc. Fill in the blanks and add funny photos, too. Display your tree when you get together with family for the holidays. ★





purple palace



mint mansion



red hot house



sugar chalet

Cooking

home

Treat your friends and family
to an adorable candy house decoration.

sweet

Made from chocolate, licorice,
gumdrops, or anything yummy, these
houses look good enough to eat!

home



The world's largest gingerbread house stands 57 feet, 3 inches high. That's almost as tall as a five-story building!

build a house

Make a basic house, then use our photos—and your imagination—for decorating ideas.



YOU WILL NEED

For 1 house

- 1 half-pint milk carton
- Stapler
- Spoon
- 1 16-ounce container of premade frosting (not the whipped kind)
- Bowl
- Powdered sugar
- Squeeze bottle—empty ketchup dispenser works well
- 6 graham crackers—any flavor

For the decorations

Use colorful sweets of all shapes and sizes.

For example:

- hard candies
- chocolates
- licorice
- gumdrops
- sour candies
- candy canes
- cereal
- mini cookies



1 Rinse out the milk carton and let it dry. Staple the spout closed. In a bowl, mix $\frac{3}{4}$ cup powdered sugar with the container of frosting. Use a spoon to scoop the frosting into the squeeze bottle.



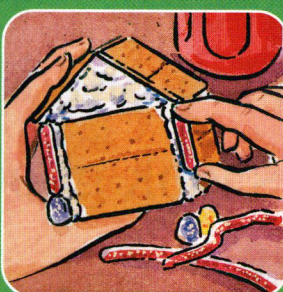
2 Trim 4 graham crackers to make them fit on the sides of the milk carton. (Nibbling is an easy way to trim them!) Squeeze a thick layer of frosting onto 1 graham cracker. Press it to 1 side of the carton. Repeat on all sides.



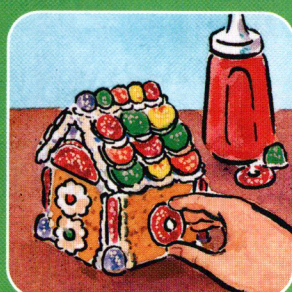
3 Squeeze a thick layer of frosting on 1 side of a graham cracker. Press it on top of the carton to make the roof. Repeat on other side.



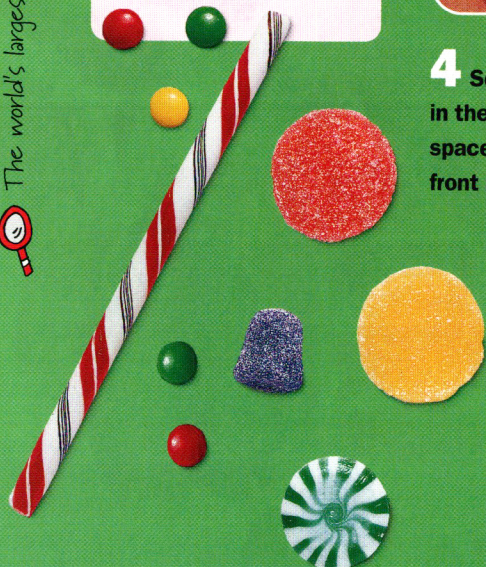
4 Squeeze frosting to fill in the triangle-shaped spaces of the carton at the front and back of the roof.



5 Squeeze a thick stripe of frosting to fill in each corner of the house. Press candies into the frosting.



6 Add candies to trim the roof and to make windows, a door, a chimney, and bushes. Attach with frosting. Let dry overnight.

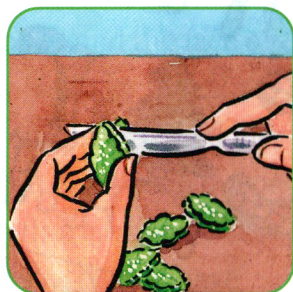


create a frosty forest

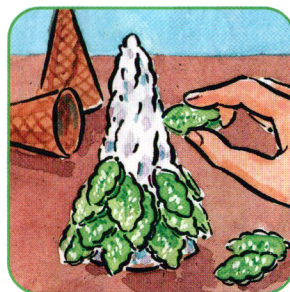
Use ice cream cones to create a forest of evergreen trees for your winter wonderland.

YOU WILL NEED

- Bag of spearmint leaf candies
- Butter knife
- Sugar cones
- Squeeze bottle filled with frosting mixture



1 To make a tree, slice spearmint leaves in half so that they are half as thick. Each spearmint leaf candy will give you 2 thin leaves.



2 Turn 1 cone upside down. Squeeze out frosting to cover the entire cone. Start at the bottom and press a row of leaves into the frosting. Add more rows of leaves, overlapping the rows as you move up the cone.



make a sweet scene

Add finishing touches, such as a fence, a path, and flaky snow!

Use frosting to attach houses and trees to a cardboard base.

Use cereal to make a house!

Break off the wide end of an ice cream cone to make a smaller tree.

For a fence, attach pretzels to the base with dots of frosting.

Sprinkle shredded coconut on the base for snow. ★

Draw a path with frosting. Crush cookies and press pieces on top of frosting path.





Contest Winners

In March, we invited you to write a short story that included this line: "It wasn't supposed to happen this way." From more than 1,400 entries, we picked these two winning stories!



Beth dreads her first Christmas without her dad, but finds some cheer in a *very* unlikely place.

"It wasn't supposed to happen this way," I muttered as Sam and I walked home. Sam was a pretty good cousin. But I couldn't complain to him about having to move here to Texas from Maine after the divorce. Sam's own parents had separated a few years ago, too.

"Here's our street," Sam pointed to the sign that read Walnut. Ever since Mom and I moved in with him and Aunt Meredith, he'd been very careful to point out the names of the streets we were on. But I was paying more attention to the unkempt house next to ours. Every time I looked at that house, I wanted to know more about it. "Does anybody live in that old place?" I asked Sam.

"Mrs. Barric lives there. Don't see her around much though."

"Does she live alone?"

"Yep. Pretty old too. But she won't let anyone help her. Mom and a few other people have tried."

Sam smiled that goofy smile of his when he has some dumb idea that usually gets me in trouble. "I double dare you to go up to Mrs. Barric's porch, ring the doorbell, and stay there until she answers," he said.

Squaring my shoulders, I walked up the porch steps and rang the bell. I immediately wished I hadn't. The door creaked open and the face of an old woman peered out.

"What do you want?" Her voice reminded me of a rosebush—seemingly soft, but watch out or you'll get pricked by a sharp thorn.

I didn't know what to say. How could I have been so stupid as to take the dare? I looked at Sam for help. To my relief, he walked up the steps.

"Ma'am, this is my cousin, Beth Morgan. I wanted her to meet you," Sam said quickly. I put on my best smile.

"Hello, Mrs. Barric," I said sweetly. "I am so glad

to meet you. Sam has told me so much about you."

"I'm sure he has," Mrs. Barric said dryly. "Now good-bye."

SLAM! The door shut right in our faces. Sam just rolled his eyes. I was a little shocked, though.

"Is she always that rude?" I asked.

"Yep."

On the way home, I couldn't help thinking that this old lady must just be lonely. "Do you think we could drop by there sometime?" I asked Sam. "Maybe we could make her a Christmas card. She didn't seem to have any decorations."

Sam's mouth dropped open. I was surprised it didn't disconnect from the rest of his body.



"I still think you're crazy," Sam mumbled. I ignored him and rang the bell. Even though I was the only one with a card, I was glad he had come along. The door cracked open, and a wrinkled face peeked out at me. "I told you kids to scram!" Mrs. Barric said loudly.

"I just wanted to wish you a merry Christmas," I said quickly.

"Well, you've done it." She started to close the door, but I stuck my foot in the way. "I made you a Christmas card, Mrs. Barric."

Her face softened when I handed her the homemade card.

"I haven't gotten a Christmas card in ten years," she said.

Surprisingly, Mrs. Barric opened her door wider and motioned for us to come in. Not knowing what else to do, I walked in after her. After hesitating, Sam followed.



Mrs. Barric poured us cups of hot chocolate and offered us cookies, winning Sam over immediately. We talked about our lives, and when we left, I knew that Mrs. Barric was just a lonesome woman who needed some friends. She kept looking at my card, finally putting it on the mantel next to pictures of her grown children and late husband.



Walking home, Sam looked thoughtful. "She sure liked that card you made for her, Beth," he said. I nodded. "You know what would be a good project?" he continued. "I think we need to get 500 people to make Christmas cards for Mrs. Barric and give them to her on Christmas day." My eyes lit up as I nodded again.



We spent the week before Christmas gathering cards. At first, almost everybody refused.



"Why should I make a card for Mrs. Mean?" one man grumbled.

"Because she needs some Christmas cheer," I said patiently. "Please, will you do this?" He wasn't buying it. "For me?" I fluttered my eyelashes.

"Oh, all right." He gave a loud sigh. I didn't care, as long as he did it.

"Have your card ready by tomorrow morning," I ordered.

Sam was laughing when we got home. "You sure know how to get what you want, don't you, Beth?"

I grinned.



Several days later, Christmas was finally here. I sat in the living room counting our cards. We did it—we had 500 cards!

"I think I'm more excited about giving Mrs. Barric her present than I am about receiving any of mine," I told Sam.

But when I looked under the tree, I wasn't excited anymore.

I was staring at one gift that I hadn't seen before—Dad's. He had sent it all the way from Maine. I opened it slowly. A



small snow globe with a tiny house, much like my old one, now laid unwrapped in my hands. All I could see, though, was my old house in Maine, the house where Mom would read me stories out loud. Dad would come home from work asking questions about my day. I couldn't stand it. I bolted—right out the front door and into the cool air.





I felt like an icicle. After all, I was still in my pajamas. But I didn't want to go back. I walked over to Mrs. Barric's. She opened the door right away and gave me some hot chocolate to warm up.

After I finished my drink, I told her my feelings. I noticed I was still holding the snow globe.

Mrs. Barric listened quietly. She took the snow globe and turned it over in her hands thoughtfully.

"My parents divorced, too," she said. "It took me years to get over the shock and forgive my parents for breaking up our family." She looked straight at me. "But when I finally let go of those bad feelings, I found something I thought I had lost."

"What was that?" I leaned forward.

"Love." Mrs. Barric was smiling. "I let myself get close to my family again. And I learned how to forgive. It was the most wonderful feeling I've ever had. Over these past few years, I've forgotten what that feels like. Thanks for reminding me, Beth."

"I think I had better go now," I said quietly. I thought about what Mrs. Barric said. Maybe she was right.

"Oh, Beth," Mom cried as I walked in the door. She ran toward me, and she scooped me up into a big, warm hug—the kind only moms can give.

"I love you, sweet Beth," she whispered in my ear.

"I love you, Mommy." I snuggled up to her like I was a little girl again.



This would've gone on forever if Sam hadn't pointed out that Mrs. Barric needed to get her cards soon, or he was going bust from waiting.



Mrs. Barric cried each time she opened a new envelope with a handmade card inside. She

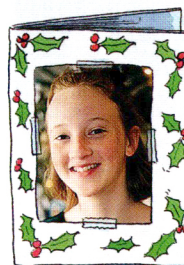


hugged me a whole lot and tried to hug Sam, but he wouldn't let her do it more than once. We didn't intend to, but we spent practically the entire day with Mrs. Barric. And, of course, we had plenty of hot chocolate.

Now it's become a tradition in our town to collect 500 cards for Mrs. Barric. Sam and I don't even need to organize it anymore. The townspeople just do it on their own without even the smallest bit of eyelash fluttering from me. ★

Meet the Author

Ruth J.



The big, old mansion that's next to my family's house gave me the idea for this story. But the couple who live there aren't cranky or mean at all. In fact, they're great neighbors!

Ruth, age 13, lives in Texas.



The Storm, the Cat, and Me

by Mikaela W.



Hannah's new kitten makes Hanukkah extra special. But when the kitten runs away, will everything be ruined?

“Meow!”
I looked up from the book I was reading for a book report. I listened very carefully.

“Meow! Meow!”

There it was again from our porch! I ran to the door and yanked it open.

A scraggly kitten was on our doormat, covered with mud and ivy leaves. It seemed to be a soft golden color with yellow-brown eyes. It looked at me pitifully and meowed again.

I scooped up the kitten and ran to the laundry room yelling, “Mom! Mom, look what I found!”

My mom looked up from the piles of dirty clothes and groaned.

“No, Hannah! No. We are *not* letting that cat stay with us. Plants, yes. Cat, no.”

“But look at it!” I protested. Just then, my sister, Eva, entered, her nose buried in a book. She’s in college now but was home for winter break. She’s majoring in zoology, the study of animals. “Is this a boy or a girl?” I asked her, holding up the kitten.

“Girl,” she said after a careful look and returned to her book. She’s not an easy one to surprise.

“Mom, it’s Hanukkah,” I said. “We are supposed to be kind to strangers.”

Mom sighed and said, “Hannah, she may belong to somebody else.”

“No,” I said, holding up the kitten. “No collar.”

Mom sighed again. “O.K. One week. We’ll put up missing posters. After a week, we’ll—I’ll decide what to do with it.”



"Don't worry, Mom! I'll give her a bath and feed her and make a bed and everything!" I exclaimed.

Washing the kitten in the sink, I managed to get all the mud off. I made her a bed from a cardboard box and my baby blankets.



That night, as the kitten curled up on the rug in front of the fire, we celebrated the first night of Hanukkah. Our *menorah*, a candlestick with nine branches, glowed on the dinner table. Two candles were lit.

Dad said the blessings over the lights, the bread, and the wine, and then we sat down to a dinner of latkes (delicious potato pancakes) with applesauce and sour cream.

It was Eva who brought up the subject. "About the cat..." she began.

"It's Gracie," I interrupted. If she was going to stay with us for a week, she should have a name.

"Gracie," Eva continued. "I could take a photo of her and post it around. And let's call the animal

shelter to ask if anyone's been looking for her."

My parents loved the idea. I looked down at my plate. Suddenly, the latkes didn't taste as good anymore.

That night, I had a dream that I was playing with Gracie when suddenly she turned into a lion and chased me all around, slashing at my ankles.

"Hey!" I yelled.

I woke up. Gracie was on my bed, biting my toes through my blanket. I put her in her box again and then fell asleep listening to the cold December rain.

Eva made flyers and posted them around town. Dad called the animal shelter, and (while I was crossing my toes, fingers, arms, legs, and eyes) they said no one had asked about a missing cat.

To prove to Mom that I would be a great cat owner, I dedicated all my free time to Gracie. I fed her. I brushed her.

I changed her litter box. I played with her, and she slept in my room every night.

I even gave her a long strip of fleece to play with as a Hanukkah present. She loved it.



By the sixth night of Hanukkah, the December rainstorms were getting worse. Our menorah was getting fuller and fuller, and there was still no sign of Gracie's fate.

But on the seventh night everything changed. We went to temple for a Hanukkah celebration and didn't get back until after 8 P.M.

"Gracie!" I called, pushing open my door when we got home. "Gracie! You can come out now." I had put Gracie in my room with her toys, food,

water, and litter box. They had not been touched. She was gone.

"Gracie's gone!" I screamed.

Mom, Dad, Eva, and I checked the house from top to bottom. Then I slipped out the side door.

A gust of icy wind and rain greeted me. I crawled around the porch looking under the chairs and tables. Gritting my teeth, I stepped off the porch and into the storm. Chilly rain pricked my cheeks and a cruel wind lifted goose bumps on me. There was a flash of lightning and a tremendous roar of thunder.

If Gracie was meowing for help, I couldn't hear her over the wind and thunder. I circled around our backyard ten times, soaked to the skin.

There was another crash of thunder, and it started to hail. Little chunks of ice stung my hands and cheeks.

I collapsed on the soggy lawn and cried, not caring if I was cold or wet or if Mom was going to have a fit when she saw me looking like Gracie had first looked.

"Gracie," I sobbed, "why did you run away? You were going to have a great home and then you spoiled everything. Mom will never let me

keep you now. It wasn't supposed to happen this way!" I yelled into the wind.

I thought back to the first time I saw Gracie covered in mud. She was so cute, even when she was covered in leaves.

Ivy leaves!

We had some ivy by our back door. Could it be?

I jumped up and sprinted to the ivy plants. Sure enough, as I neared them, I heard pitiful meowing.

"Gracie!"

I scooped up the disgruntled, muddy cat, and I ran inside. "Look! I found her!"

I told the whole story of going out to find her and her hiding in the ivy.

"But how did she get from your room to the ivy?" Dad asked.

"Well, earlier today, I opened my window when it wasn't raining. I guess I forgot to shut it," I said, blushing at my irresponsibility. "So she got out."

"Well, I've got to hand it to you, kid," said Dad, "you showed some real bravery."

I blushed again, flattered, but he didn't say anything about keeping Gracie.

I sighed sadly as I lay in bed that night. Gracie was curled up by my knees. "Enjoy your sleep, Gracie," I said sadly. "It'll be your last night here."

Even the unusually large present for me the last night of Hanukkah couldn't cheer me up. The flames on our menorah looked at me like angry eyes, cursing me for ruining Gracie's chance for a wonderful life. We went through our prayers, but I said them without any enthusiasm, dreading what would come next.

After the last word was uttered, Dad said, "I think we should give presents to the youngest first." He smiled at me. "Hannah, this is for you!"

He handed me the large gift. I lifted the lid off the box. "Gracie!" I picked the fluffy golden kitten





out of the box. She purred and rubbed her head against my jaw.

"You'll let me keep her?" I asked Mom and Dad. "Even though she got out of my room?"

Mom and Dad smiled. "Everyone makes mistakes," said Dad. "And you handled it responsibly. She's yours."

Gracie's fur felt soft and warm. I looked at the candles of the menorah. Now the flaming eyes were smiling at me, glad that this kitten was in good hands. ★

Meet the Author

Mikaela W.



My cat, Lily, was one inspiration for this story—she looks like Gracie. The other inspiration was my sister's cat, Danny, who got lost one day last spring, and we had to search for him in the rain!

Mikaela, age 14, lives in California.

Honorable mentions go to:

Michelle H.
Age 13, New York

Brittany W.
Age 12, Minnesota

Alyssa H.
Age 14, Michigan

Hannah S.
Age 11, New Jersey

New Contest!

Award-winning writer Gail Carson Levine starts the story—and *you* finish it!

1. Your story must start with this sentence written by Gail: *There it was—a diamond necklace on my seat.*

Give your story a summer setting. All characters in your story must be original creations.

2. Include your first and last name, address, phone number, and birth date. A parent must sign your story, stating that you made it up.

3. Your story shouldn't be longer than six handwritten pages or three typed pages.

4. Mail your story to the address on page 2 by December 5. Winners will appear in the July/August 2003 issue.

The Giggle Gang

Snow Globe Shuffle

Kim and her pals looked in a shop and saw that the snow globes on each shelf had a pattern. The window designer plans to add one more globe to each shelf. Can you figure out which one from the globes below? Bonus toughie: What pattern do the remaining globes share?



What is the most musical piece of a turkey? The drumstick.

Alexa P.
Age 11, Pennsylvania

Why do snowmen hate to hear uplifting stories? Because it warms their hearts.



What do monkeys sing at Christmas time? "Jungle Bells, Jungle Bells!"

Christina M.

What do snowmen ride to school? Icicles.

Age 10, New York

All answers on page 42.

Snowy Scramble

Unscramble the falling snow to answer each riddle below.



1. What do snowmen eat for breakfast?

snowflakes



2. Where do snowmen keep their money?

snowbanks



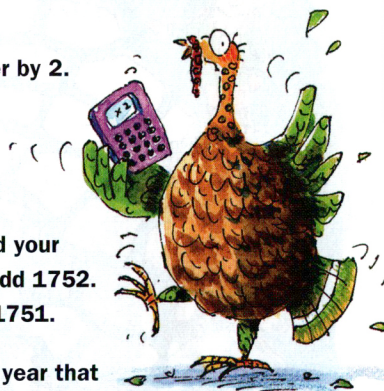
3. Where do snowmen go to dance?

snowballs

Amazing Math

Surprise your family this Thanksgiving with a mind-boggling puzzle sent in by Mallory D., 14, of Maryland.

1. Choose the number of days in a week you would like to celebrate Thanksgiving. (1 to 7)
2. Multiply that number by 2.
3. Add 5.
4. Multiply by 50.
5. If you've already had your birthday this year, add 1752. If you haven't, add 1751.
6. Subtract the 4-digit year that you were born.



Tada! The first digit you end up with is your original number. The next two numbers are your age!

Frozen Stiff

This game is fun with a small group. IT tries to tag each player four times—on each arm and each leg. Wherever IT tags a player, that limb can't bend. The game ends when everyone runs around with stiff arms and legs!



Teacher: Amy, spell "glacial." Student: I-C (icy)!

Molly P. Age 13, Wisconsin

Why did the turkey cross the road? The chicken was on vacation.



He felt crummy.

What's it called when two snowmen fight? An ice box.

Chelsea B. Age 14, Georgia

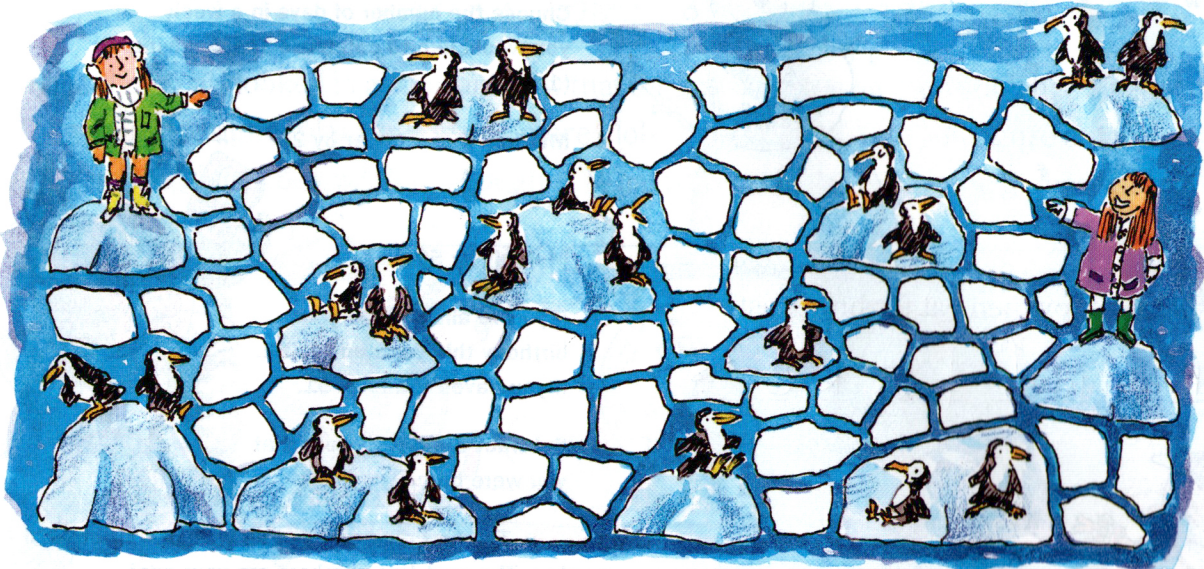
Why did the gingerbread boy stay home from school?

The Giggle Gang

Penguin Play

You and a pal each start on any iceberg. Taking turns, hop from one white-colored iceberg to the next, trying to catch each other. Trace your paths with a marker as you go, because you can't jump

onto any iceberg you've already been on! To win, try to be the one to jump onto the iceberg the other player is on with your next move! The player must be on an iceberg that's right next to yours.



AG Code

Use your AG decoder to discover what snowmen eat at Thanksgiving!



chili and

cold cuts!

Answer Box

Behind the Scenes: A tissue box!

The buzzword, folderol, appears on page 24.

AG Code: Chili and cold cuts!

3. snowballs

Snowy Scramble: 1. snowflakes, 2. snowbanks,



(All the figures have red dots.)

Snow Globe Shuffle: Shelf 1: C (All the globes have just one figure.) Shelf 2: B (All the figures in the globes start with the letter S.) Shelf 3: E

Bonus toughie:

All the globe

bases are yellow!

What does it mean when Rudolph's nose is blinking? He needs to change his bulb soon!

Anna K.

Why don't you ever hear any news about Santa's brother?

He became a ho ho hobo.



What do you get if you eat decorations off the Christmas tree? Tinsellitis.

Hannah Claire B.

Age 12, Maryland

Know any jokes, puzzles, or games? Send them to The Giggle Gang! (Include your first and last name, birth date, and signature.) See page 2 for the address.

Who's That Girl?

Here's an American girl of yesterday. Read the clues about her and guess who she is now.



Clue 1

At age 10, my friends and I had a writing group, "The Scribble Scrabble Club." For our magazine, I wrote a new version of an old favorite, *Little Women*.



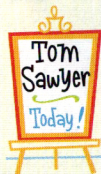
Clue 2

As a New York City girl, I loved sliding down Central Park's steep, slippery rocks. One day, my friend and I shredded the backs of our pants! Our new style on the subway home? Jackets knotted around the waist.



Clue 3

Although we had no Christmas tree, my sister and I hung stockings off our TV cabinet. Nearby, the menorah's candles twinkled. With a bit of Christmas *and* Hanukkah, Decembers were doubly delightful!



Clue 4

My theater group often visited hospitals. While performing *Tom Sawyer*, the kids watching us perked up during a fight scene, wanting it to go on forever. Their smiles said we were good medicine!



Here I am at age 10.



Clue 5

My sister and I liked strolling through the topiary gardens at a New York museum. But I always wondered if those bushes liked growing in shapes or if they'd rather just say, "Leaf me alone!"

Take a guess!

When this American girl grew up, she became:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> an actress | <input type="checkbox"/> a fashion designer |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> a writer | <input type="checkbox"/> a landscape architect |

Turn the page and find out if you're right!

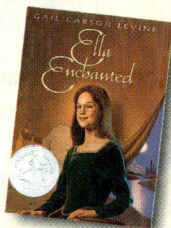
She's Gail Carson Levine



Putting a new twist on old tales—plus creating many stories of her own—has helped author Gail Carson Levine live happily ever after!

Gail endured nine years of rejections before a publisher finally agreed to publish her first novel, *Ella Enchanted*.

It's her Cinderella story of a funny and feisty—but also cursed—girl named Ella. While working on the book, Gail took writing classes and met with other children's authors for encouragement and suggestions. Had Gail given up, girls never would have had a chance to read her award-winning book—or to see the upcoming film version.



To become a success, Gail needed lots of determination and plenty of good ideas. But from the days of her earliest stories, written with her "Scribble Scrabble" friends, Gail knew the big key was to have fun. "Writing is a wonderful way to find out about yourself and surprise yourself. It's a gift, because you come up with things you don't expect!" she says.

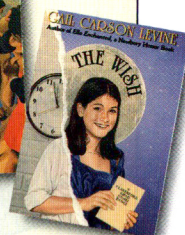
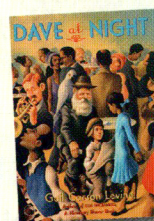
But that doesn't mean that after years of writing, it's always easy. When Gail has trouble writing, she brainstorms lists of new ideas,

pretends to interview her characters, or paces around her fireplace until she thinks of what should come next.

She often relies on her past experiences to start up something new.

Boosting Gail's stories today are memories of holiday traditions, city adventures, museum visits—and, of course, favorite fairy tales!

For Gail, the best part of writing is getting to use her creativity and imagination. She says, "Something wonderful kicks in as I'm writing, and I feel great!" ★



Gail's advice to American girls:

"Never give up, but always find a way to have a great time, too!"

Gail C L

You can write to Gail
c/o HarperCollins
1350 Avenue of the
Americas, 4th Floor
New York, NY 10019

Gail with
Baxter, her
Airedale



HELP!

Dear American Girl,

I gave my friend a Christmas present that I made. When she opened it, she didn't like it—just because it was homemade! I feel really bad.

Hurt

It was impolite of your friend to let you know she didn't like your gift. She's also missing the *real* gift: your thoughtfulness in taking the effort to make a one-of-a-kind item just for her. If you decide to give her a gift next year, choose something simple, and put your energy into making presents for people who'll appreciate them.



Dear American Girl,

We will be having our first school dance, and my mom signed up to chaperone! She says she wants to know what goes on at the dance. I tried talking her out of it but had no luck. What should I do?

Embarrassed

There's no way you'll change your mom's mind. But just because your mom will be there doesn't mean you can't have a good time. She'll



be busy keeping an eye on things, and once you're with your friends, you might even forget she's there.

Act mature and be on your best behavior at this dance, and maybe Mom will decide to let other parents chaperone the next one.



Dear American Girl,

I think I'm bossy. I asked my friend if she thought I was, and she said, "Yes!" I don't want to be bossy anymore. Can you help me?

The Leader

Remind yourself that other people have opinions, too. Make sure you ask people to do things, not tell them. Questions such as "Would you like to play this game?" and "What would you like to do?" will give your friends a chance to share

their ideas instead of automatically doing what you want to do. If a friend suggests a plan that isn't your first choice, be a good sport. You can always do your plan next. Finally, try coming up with a code phrase that your friends can use if they think you're being too bossy, like, "Whatever you say, boss!"

With a little practice, you'll be less bossy—and a better friend.



Dear American Girl,

Ever since my grandpa died, the holidays haven't been the same. How can I enjoy the holidays without him?

Holiday blues

The holidays won't be the same without your grandpa—they can't be. But you should keep in mind that he would have wanted you to enjoy them anyway. If traditions make you too sad, talk to your family about doing things a bit differently this year. In time, when something reminds you of your grandpa, instead of feeling sad, you'll enjoy the chance to share happy memories and reminisce about how much you love him.

MORE HELP!

Dear American Girl,

I got glasses and everyone is teasing me. I'm sick of it! How could a pair of glasses ruin my whole life?

Four-eyes

Once your glasses don't seem so new, the teasing should stop. Until then, the next time someone calls you four-eyes, take off your glasses and say, "No, these aren't eyes. They're glasses." You could also say, "Four-eyes? Oh, I get it. You're trying to be funny." Seeing you feel bad is what these kids want, so don't let them get under your skin.

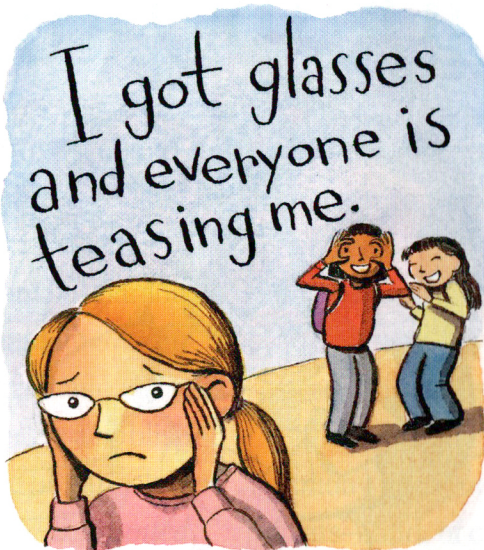


Dear American Girl,

I'm 13 years old and my parents still call me by my nickname, Sissy. I've nicely asked them to stop, but they still do it. When they call me Sissy, I say, "It's Samantha!" Then *they* get mad.

Sissy

Calling you Sissy is a habit your parents probably don't want to break. They say it to show their affection, even though it drives you nuts. Make sure your siblings, friends, teachers, and relatives



know you would like to be called Samantha, not Sissy, and most of the time you will be. Then, when Mom or Dad calls you Sissy, you will know that at least everyone else thinks of you as Samantha.



Dear American Girl,

My friend wants to borrow my favorite CD, but I don't want to lend it to her because she leaves her CDs on the floor and doesn't even put them in their cases. I feel really bad because I have been purposely "forgetting" to bring it. How can I say no without being mean?

No Way

The trick is to say no without criticizing your friend. If you bring up the way she treats her own CDs, she's bound to promise to be

careful with yours. Will she really be more careful? Who knows? Instead, tell your friend you love that CD so much that you can't bear to part with it, and invite her to come over to listen to it at your house. Or surprise her with her own copy of it for her birthday or for the holidays. Then you'll both be happy.



Advice from You

"We're sisters, and we made a peace token out of plastic beads. Now, whenever we fight, the sister who started it gives the other sister the token as a way of saying she's sorry without starting another argument. This has helped us both to 'forgive and forget' a lot of past arguments."

Katie T. Emily T.
Age 13 and Age 11, California

Need advice? Got advice? Write:
Help!

American Girl

8400 Fairway Place
Middleton, WI 53562



At the "Home Sweet Home" photo shoot, a food stylist made the houses look picture perfect. For more on the photo shoot, go to "Behind the Scenes" at americangirl.com.



Behind the Scenes

Candy houses and Santa outfits—see what fun we had making this issue!

At the last minute we decided to wrap up a pretty present for Nikki to hold. We ran to the store and bought something we'd *never* give as a gift, but it was just the right size. Can you guess what it was? Was it a box of baby wipes, a box of tissues, or a box of light bulbs? Answer on page 42.



Here are five of the most popular outfits you designed for Santa:

- 1 Swimsuits
- 2 Pajamas
- 3 Disco clothes
- 4 Golf duds
- 5 Basketball gear



We talked turkey with "Turkey Talk" illustrator Amanda Haley.

Do you have any Thanksgiving Day traditions?
Every year I watch the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade on TV.

What is your favorite food at Thanksgiving dinner?
I absolutely love stuffing!

What is your favorite animal to illustrate? Is it a turkey?
Actually, I love to draw dogs.



Amanda's turkey from "Turkey Talk"



"Plants, yes. Cat, no."

To get just the right expression on the mom's face on page 37, we sent the illustrators a snapshot of Kristi, our Editor, making a face. After seeing the photo, they drew the perfect look!

For more Behind the Scenes scoop, check out americangirl.com.

**It's American Girl's
10th Birthday!**

Help us celebrate with lots of surprises!

Make a Wish!

Find out how girls around the world celebrate their birthdays.

Friends & Fun

How well do you know your pal?
Take our quiz!

For lots
more fun, visit
americangirl.com!
Get new craft and
snack ideas at
"To Do Today!"

American Girl®

Coming up in the January/February issue

HAPPY BIRTHDAY AG!

**Birthday Bash
Bonanza**

The best snacks,
decorations,
and games for
your party!

**Song Contest
Winners**

Find out which
birthday songs
take the cake.

**Reader
Roundup**

Fun facts and
surprising stories
about girls like
you who read AG

Glitter Girls

Make the
sparkliest cards
you've ever seen!

